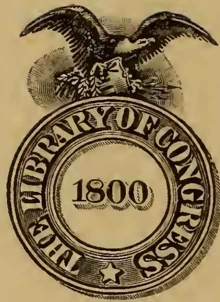
LONEWOOD CORNER

BY

JOHN HALSHAM



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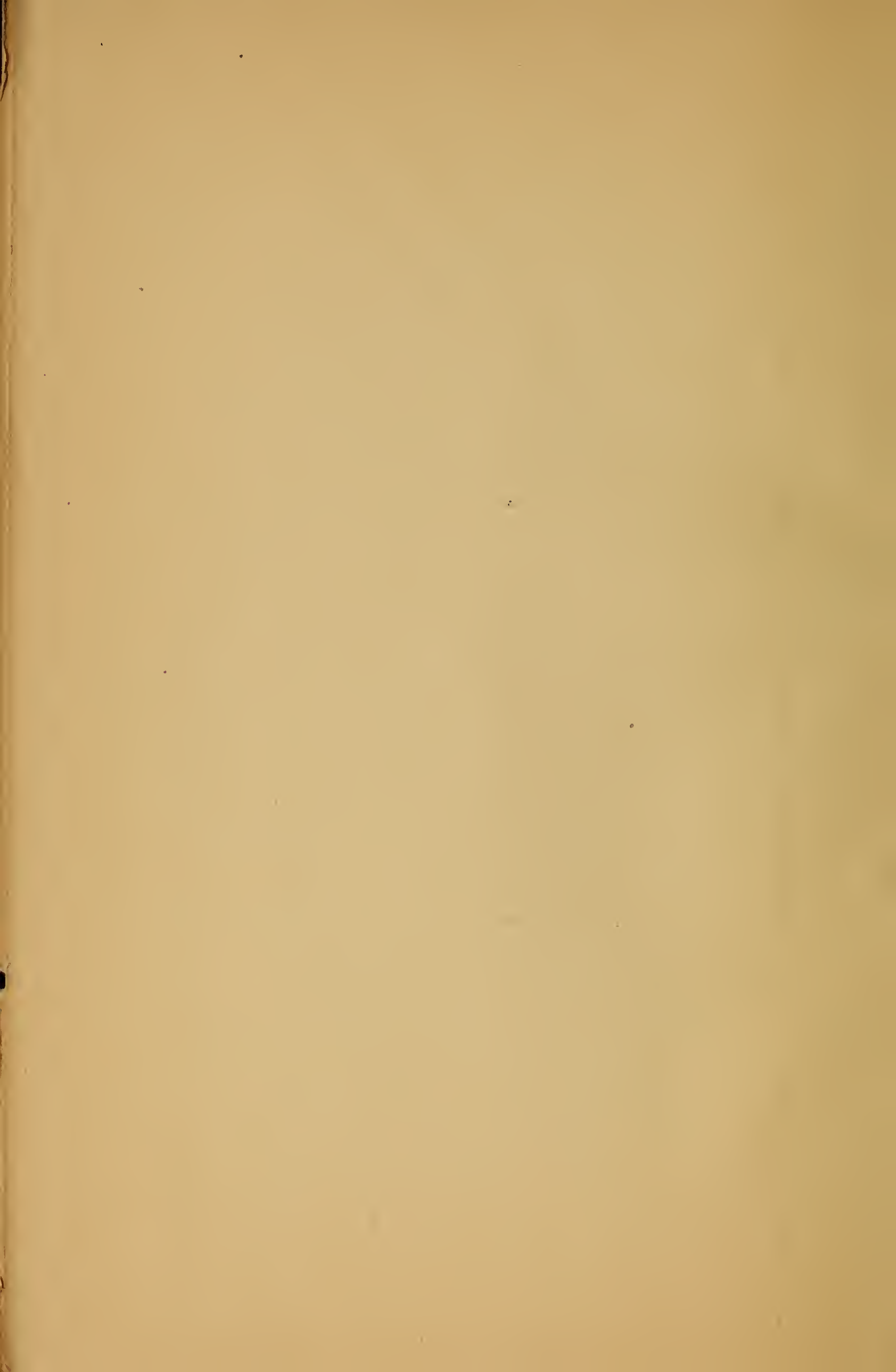

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LONEWOOD CORNER

ἔασόν με ἑορτάσαι, ὥσπερ οἱ ἀργοὶ τὴν διάνοιαν εἰώθασιν ἑστιᾶσθαι ὑφ' ἑαυτῶν, ὅταν μόνοι πορεύωνται.

LONEWOOD CORNER

A COUNTRYMAN'S HORIZONS

BY

JOHN HALSHAM

AUTHOR OF "IDLEHURST"

Satius est . . . otiosum esse quam nihil agere

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NOTE

THE Author's thanks are due to the Editor of *The Saturday Review* for leave to embody here the substance of five articles which have appeared in that Review.

LONEWOOD CORNER

I

INTRODUCTORY

My dear Paterson,

Ten years ago I addressed to you, and through you to what we call the reading public, a few pages by way of introduction to the country journal which I named "Idlehurst." Here is another book ready to go into the world; and it seems fitting, as both you and I have maintained our fixity of place and of humours through so considerable a portion of our course, that I should mark our consistency in a fleeting scene by making you in the second book fulfil the same office which you did in the first. I have indeed moved my tabernacle a few geographical miles, to drive my stakes all the faster in the clay of the Weald; and you, though you no longer look over the Heath to the great cauldron simmering under its fumes, yet tell me that Golder's Green is practically Hampstead still; in all other conditions I think we may claim to have resisted very fairly Time's alteration.

And yet there is a large difference between the antecedents of the first book and of the last. "Idlehurst" grew together with an ease that seems almost astonishing now, in desultory fits and odd hours of summer out-of-doors; there was, I suppose, a certain amount of matter, the accumulation of a good many years, undrawn-on and ready to run over on to paper by a sort of capillary attraction in the fingering of a pencil. With the second collection, though there was no doubt something of old material unexhausted, and something of new has accrued in the interval, the vein never seemed to run with the unlaborious trickle of earlier days. The reason is perhaps not far to seek: the first papers were casual and irresponsible, taken up and left at the sole instance of humours and chances, with scarcely a thought of public suffrages till they had almost come to full shape. When an author has once spoken with the world, that early ease and carelessness can never come again; the shield is suspended on the pavilion, or if you like the figure better, the shutters are down, and the adventurer is under the law of the comparative. By the public I mean here not the unknown vast into which an author pitches his voice, the void which, for any human echo that comes back to him, might be the primal chaos itself; but the tangible few here and there in the profound—candid friends and friends of friends, strangers who turned into friends, one or two

reviewers, material instead of vaguely kind, critics casual but pertinent, heard of at the third or fourth rebound—from whom some sort of personal answer has returned. It is these, I think, which an author—in the earlier stages of his career, at least—should have in mind ; more, perhaps, than some more customary censures. For myself, in presenting my new book, I take a good deal of pains to consider the criticism of the old, as it comes back to me from those points of solid meaning in the intangible vast. I note a consensus of feeling that there was no harm in the thing : a general attribution of a sedative, if not a soporific effect, acceptable in certain kinds of fatigue or convalescence, and sometimes serviceable as a nightcap : of a desultoriness which made it suitable for reading piecemeal at odd times, together with a certain homogeneous quality which has made people—sometimes quite unlikely people, as I should have judged—capable of reading it through as much as a dozen times. These are characteristics, among those which it is proper to discuss, which I can admit at once ; a gift of mild-eyed melancholy, though I fail to observe it myself, I will not dispute against some very respectable critics. In reply to a few hints that there are here and there pedantic leanings to be discovered, and a too liberal sprinkling of quotations and tags in the dead languages, I would ask the anti-classical rebukers to skip the offending scraps, and believe

that they are an old sort of Abracadabra spell, which, even if it does not conjure, as some old-fashioned people declare it does, is at least harmless to robuster minds, and may be avoided without seriously dislocating the text. To ladies—if there be any still who are not learned—I make no apology; I know how they appreciate the air of those light italics which relieve the solid page.

It is critics with some such prepossessions as these that I should wish to please, and that I run the risk of disappointing, with my new collection. I believe that I am at least conscious of the various mishaps possible in the carrying out of the design; I know the Nemesis which not infrequently attends upon continuations and sequels; I recognise the chance that all the lighter spirit which originally worked to a perhaps half lucky result may have altogether evaporated in the repetition, the just-caught balance of humours may have passed into a weighty pose. I know the sad declensions unawares to disproportionate emphasis, to formula, to sentiment, to sermons. You, at least, will not accuse me of making light of the peculiar disadvantages of middle age; you will have heard me blame the unbent nerves, the hesitation about sticking the point of one's mind into the middle of sometimes twy-seeming truth; I see that a man may accustom himself to the pleasures of the *fallentis semita vitæ* till, like a rabbit in the poacher's wire, he hangs himself up through

treading his one little track across the green meadows of the world. Other habits and states there are which hinder a free traffic in feelings and opinions; such as the natural lowering of temperature in one's enthusiasm, the temptation to love irony for its own sake, the position—in which I have been for some time pretty well rooted—that one's adversaries in various sorts of debate have ceased to count, while the main difficulties come from the upholders of one's own side.

Against these discouragements I can set a tolerable array of gains. Ten years can do a good deal to condense the aqueous principle of sentiment into solid bottoming of knowledge; in that space I find that humanity has supplied me with support and proof to my theories in the kindest possible way; my dealings with books (more and more among the untainted witnesses of the old world) bring me continuous accessions of confidence and ratifications of lucky shots. Every day adds a touch to fill in the sketch-ideas of the prime; early notions, shooting out in seeming-random right lines like the first growth of ice-crystals on a pond, are crossed and recrossed by others at all angles, and are presently meshed up to a practicable solidity. (The illustration has, no doubt, a suggestion of frigidity, but I leave it to your good sense.) There is clear gain in the middle-aged frame of mind which knows that "il-y-a des pertes triomphantes à l'envy des

victoires," which can let the press go by, and is content to serve with a clear-eyed courage that mistress who neither grants nor refuses anything, neither follows nor flies. And, lastly, there is gain in a detail of the domestic management of one's mind, the usage of reserve so that a man may keep open house, and let the world have the run of his hall and stairs, his picture-gallery or library, may admit accredited people even to a private parlour, yet keep the key of a room or so to himself, perhaps even have a little oratory in the heart of the house, unsuspected behind the secret door in the panelling.

I have admitted that there may be dangers in the making of continuation or sequel-books ; but perhaps after all the present volume will be found to follow its predecessor at a safe distance. You will see that the ten years have shifted the scene and changed the persons. My walks are no more in Arnington ; and even if they were, I could not have drawn many of the old faces. The Rector, talking of having been too long on the ground, has gone away to a small living in Lincolnshire ; Alice is married in India ; Bob is working on a railway in Natal ; Margaret Fletcher is a nurse in the North ; Gervase French is in London, gone out of my ken. Others of the old company I sometimes see for a moment at street corners and over cottage gates when I make one of my rare visits to the old neighbourhood. Bish touches

his hat—the battered billycock of the past—from the wood-pile at Dogkennel, a little greyer and more stooped than of yore, his face yet more melancholy-lined, and we exchange hollow sentiments about the season and the crops; Liza Packham I doubtfully perceive in the roundabout mother of six; sometimes, at garden parties whose net has made a wider sweep, I come across Mrs. Kitty French or Mrs. Latimer, shadows of what I recollect. The General is dead, and Tomsett and Avery. Zero's successor already begins to blink at me with eyes a little misty in the sunlight, and I think to hunt the hedges with less furious zeal. Only old Lucy, faithful still, but beginning to fail a little, has followed to the new estate.

There are natural differences in the general outlook upon our world then and now. The frenzy of haste and the destruction of natural beauty continue at much the old rate; but I think with even less protest raised than before: we are so far poorer as a people that we cannot even think of affording ourselves an hour of clear leisure, or a piece of unspoiled country larger than a deer-park. The older graces of living continue to vanish in the natural progression; the democratic standards of decency and civility in converse, the sense of amenity in being have mechanically declined, very much as it seemed probable they would ten years ago. But the general inundation which I sometimes apprehended shows no sign of

breaking over us *yet*; it still seems imminent, to certain humours; but the wave has now for some while hung above us in a nodding fixity, like the Red Sea in the old pictures of the passage of the Children of Israel. The blight of flat monotony still spreads upon our world, beginning from the schools; but there are energies of resistance and sources of refreshment which I did not sufficiently allow for in my former estimate. I have come to the cautious conclusion that in this direction things may last our time.

So much for variety in the matter of the book; I think you will also find differences in the handling of it. I have proposed to take in a wider sweep of the horizon with my spy-glass; the doings of the village and the fields have a more general reference to the needs of humanity and the portents of the time. You will find a good deal less about the garden, and something more about people and books than the former work contained. Altogether I think that those who, like you, have once or twice suggested a further chapter of "Idlehurst" will find here something more than a mere decanting of an old vintage under a new label. There have been fresh gatherings of grapes; and if there were a few sour ones among them, in these precocious days a jar sealed down for ten years has quite a claim to have digested its ranker humours. If all prove flat in the drinking, as may well be, —for the grower, who has a taste for the plump

purples of his vine rows, is as a rule a poor judge of the bin—put it down to bad seasons, or unkindly soil, or the influence of baleful comets, and do not believe that the thinness is due to any dilution of the old lees, or squeezings of remainder grape-skins in the press.

You see that I have been beforehand with a variety of exceptions, possible to be taken by you and the critics which you so kindly typify for me. If these defences fail, I retire to my impregnable hold ; the book is a parergon, as all literature of the tertiary rank and under should be. Say it is vapid, irritatingly cocksure, precious, strains after humour, meddles with matters above its range ; lay on and spare not ; you do not touch me. You know all the time that my business is with my turnips and onions, my Beurré pears, my pansies and long-tailed columbines. The book goes out by itself, a sub-product of the spade and hoe : you may remember my old opinion that all authors would be the better for an independence earned among saladings and worts. For critics, too, something of the back-bending discipline would often be very salutary ; it would, for one thing, show them the true place and possibilities of a parergon. There is, in the "Itinera Phantastica" of Carbonarius Secundus, a story of a hermit of Lower Egypt, who cultivated onions near his cell by the side of the Nile. He wrote a treatise on the bulb, wherein he praised God for all its virtues

of taste and smell and comely proportions and healthful properties, and for all the meanings mystically contained in it—its spherical, tunicated form, its aroma, so mixed of bitter-sweet that as he said he contemplated it *δακρυόεν γελάσας*. He extended his thanksgiving to ninety-nine articles, and for all his pains was unable to excogitate a hundredth clause. One morning he woke to find that an angelic hand had filled in the hiatus in his papyrus: he had forgotten to give thanks for that onions were made with tails to hang them up by. There is a moral of uses here which I leave to your apprehension, though you may never have bunched your onions in September sun, nor found occasion to trouble your head to think what devices a man may find in after-works, at the second or the third remove.

II

January 1.

It is, perhaps, well for us to be taken up by the roots and transplanted two or three times in our lives, as certain shrubs in nursery-gardens with a view to their better standing, as gardeners say, the final shift. Though my last remove was not accomplished without some rending of the stiffened fibres, and I think that some part of me was left behind in the familiar ground, yet sooner than I could have fancied the wounds barked over, the roots began to stir in their new station, to burrow and lay hold round about them for the anchorage and sustenance which must be found if there is to be any more leaf or flower—fruit, shall I say?—from the old stock, as the sap moves at the season. In the present case, the remove was not to any great distance, in terms of space. In no very long walks I still pass the old gate now and then, and sometimes stop a minute to look over it. I have not been inside it since my tenancy ended, though the house remains empty and the garden is fast going back to wildness. That is all done with and put away in its proper place. To revisit

the borders I planted, the rooms I grew to, except in the immunity of dreams, those night-long summers whose magic air brings all our crude remembrances together to a mellow unity, would be too gross a confusion. If one must be a ghost, disembodied and sent adrift, this at least remains, to vow by Styx never to haunt and hang about the old domain. Five miles away from the land-mark fir-clump that for so many years set me my course for home, and still beckons sometimes in evening walks to the indocile mind, five miles away as the wood-dove flies, is the new quarter into which I begin to grow—a narrower close and a somewhat lowlier roof than the old, as befits the shrinkage, natural to the increase of days, in energy and in other material of life. I am again on the outskirts of a village : I still enjoy seclusion or society at my choice. Sheringham is not half so large a place as Arnington, and is some ten years behind it in its stage of growth. The invasion of consequential cottages and modest-simpering villas, which began to overpower the old rustic grace of Arnington's looks, has hardly reached the remoter settlement. Here are also larger remnants of the old life and ways, excrescences which so far have escaped the jack-plane of Progress. Above all things the place owns the priceless gift of A CHARACTER, an idiosyncrasy of talents and humours, a proper twist in ways of seeing and doing, differences other than those

by which its more progressive neighbours seem distinguishable—by the possession of a heavier rate, that is to say, of a less considerable Parish Council, of a more heatedly personal squabble over the drains. In due time the rising tide will no doubt overflow this higher ridge of the vanishing shore; but meanwhile here is some dozen years' respite from the crawling invasion—and a dozen years should suffice for a comfortable breathing-space, perhaps even for the achieving of projects of several kinds. The lesser circuit of my boundaries leaves me rather more leisure than I once enjoyed. I find myself putting away my book and strolling down to the village of a morning in a way which not so long ago I should have called mere slacking. In the new order of things—four years still leaves it new to a slow-moulded temperament—a feeling of detachment which is an old failing grows stronger, a sense of walking about among my kind, speculant, aloof. I find myself, after the change in life that had run unbroken into the fourth lustrum, more than ever an onlooker; I have no less interest in my neighbours' concerns, I hope, but I observe them more consciously from without. It is partly due to this contemplative humour, perhaps, that I often end my daily walks at the church, and by an established understanding with old Lewry the sexton, find my way through the dark tower-postern and up the rickety ladders to the belfry. There

among the huge crooked timbers, bleached by centuries of wind and weather, with the bells, silent monsters, at rest in the pits of their cage beneath me, I lean on the edge of the trefoil window, and in a compendious bird's-eye view, consider the village spread out below. I have had, for as long as I can remember, a liking for belfries; one of my earliest heroes was Moses Branch, the little surly man who kept spades and mattocks and certain ominous planking in a dark hole under the tower at Sandwell, and was master of the key of the winding stair, strewn with the jackdaws' litter, leading to the ringing-chamber and the giddy platform of the leads, whence one looked breathlessly between the battlements over the flat world, the dwarfed, slow-moving traffic of the roads, the works of men, to the lifted verge of the hills. Moses, I remember, dispensed the green grease from the bearings of the bell-trunnions, a sovereign remedy for the bad legs of the parish, whose virtue lay as much, no doubt, in an attributed sanctity as in its oxides. Here, as I clamber over the frames, the clotted oil drips from the brasses and soaks into the flooring, but no sexton's knife scrapes it now for the needs of the good women in the street. Our faith, when our legs are bad—and we are a much-afflicted race in that way—is nowadays exercised on other, perhaps no less simple medicaments.

From this pinnacle above the common levels

of mankind, where the swifts shriek in an ecstasy of play as they whirl across the sun-baked southern face of the tower, and the jackdaws come and go upon their own devices with jerky inconsequence, I watch the life of the street, of the yards and gardens, the suburb fields, with my instinct of detached speculation at fullest play. The point of observation has its peculiar influence; one is here at the very heart of the parish, the centre about which it has shaped itself for a thousand years. I am in the secrets of the clock which rules the republic down below; the sudden stroke of the hour, which sets a hundred labourers in the fields to their dinners, or calls the children in to school, is notified to me by premonitory clicks and whirrings of the machine; and visible tuggings of cranks and wires prepare me for the uproar of the halting chimes and the thunderous clang of the tenor, whose note, a scarcely heard vibration of melancholy sound, used at times to reach me on the south-west wind in the garden under the fir-clump at Idlehurst. The great bell, whose crown bears the legend PRAIS GOD. 1601. still sounds the knell to call the tenth generation to their place where the headstones lean and weather, and the unmarked mounds sink to the level of the grassy plot below. The very masonry of the belfry has, I cannot help thinking, a sort of sonority, that answers the chance noises of the street—the clink of the smith's hammer or the rumble of the mill-

waggons—with a peculiar retentiveness. I like to think that this is due to the sæcular vibration of the bells, a sympathy of matter acquired in the course of time. These ancient louvre-boards of split and hoary oak have, I assert, a timbre of their own, absorbed from the million rounds, backstroke and handstroke, that have sounded over them to the ears below—Sunday chimes, lulling slumbrous afternoons in harvest, or blown in gusty syncopations through the roaring elms; all the wedding treble-bob majors; the melancholy changes for the old year, heard over frosty fields; the muffled peals for the departed great; the clash of the "firing" for Trafalgar or Waterloo. The tower has so long spoken to the street, and for the street, that one may well take that material sympathy for a probable opinion, at least.

From the height the village lies spread like a map before me; the highroad, fringed with the irregular line of comely cottages and self-respecting houses which make up Sheringham Street, winds away past the gates of the Park, the great house half hidden in groves of oak and fir, across the wide stretches of heathy common lying to the south, towards the long wall of the Downs. The street itself, embowered in old polled limes that border the wide grass verges on either side, is still sufficiently rural. The line of the houses is broken by the purlieus of two farms, the grey and green squares of whose fields are interchanged with the

cottage-gardens and yards of the hamlet. There are but five or six houses of the better sort—all ancient, with tiled or timbered fronts, stone roofs, and red-brick towers of chimney-stacks—whose outward look alone means security and repose. The two inns, the Talbot and the Dolphin, and the little beershop, the Crocodile, hang their signs over the short stretch of brick pavement which marks the forum, the busy centre of the commune.

Close underneath the church lies the Almshouse—our Hospital of Saint Mary and Saint John in Sheringham of the foundation of Ralphe Noyes; its green quadrangle, the gaping mouths of its chimneys, its mossed red roofs, its bell-turret, its gardens, trim hedged and plotted out in little squares; its wood-yard, its Warden's lodge, are all laid out, neat and fine as an architect's plan, before the observer's eyes. About the court and the gardens move the bent, slow-pacing figures of the almsmen, or sit motionless an hour together on the benches under the southern wall. At the hours of the Rule the turret-bell calls the commoners to Chapel or to Hall; and long after the parish clock has told the hour, a slumbrous note, like a bell in a dream, gives the little world its own time. Sometimes from his Lodge comes the Warden, spare, erect, abruptly moving, stopping a minute to speak to one of the bedesmen at the gate, and then with raised hand and quickened pace striding into the greater world. He looks

up at the church tower as he passes, to mark the time, and those piercing eyes beneath the bushy grey brows, though a hundred feet below, seem as though they must espy me in my covert under the shingles of the spire. He makes no sign, but passes on to the street, bound on pastoral errands, which as *locum tenens* for the Vicar he has, during the last year, added to his charge at the Hospital.

During an hour's watch from the belfry window on a fine forenoon you shall see almost every figure of our commonwealth. About twelve there is a sort of excursus of the gentry of the street. The Misses Walcot, the two old ladies from The Laurels, take their morning walk to the Post Office, punctual as the sun. Captain Prendergast fetches his newspaper, and if affairs be strenuous, unfurls it there and then, and reads as he makes quarter-deck turns up and down the pavement between the Dolphin and the Pond. From the Park gates, in dowdiest country things, to do her shopping, walks Lady Anne, whose ancient barouche and reverend greys were never known to appear before the hour of the afternoon drive. A dashing, yellow-wheeled dog-cart brings down from Frogswell Place Mrs. Sims-Bigg, one of our leaders of society and a personage in politics, to send off her telegrams and meet her trains. And now that he is home on leave, Harry Mansel, with his pipe and his dachshund, saunters down to look at his mare at the Talbot stables, attaching himself

impartially to all he meets, Lady Anne or the ancient sisters of The Laurels, and visibly welcome to all.

At eleven o'clock the proletariat drifts from the hod or the hoe to its morning beer; the forge is silent, the swish of the cross-cut ceases at the saw-pit. There you may see, making towards the Dolphin, Tom Prevett, our demagogue, a terrible Radical yet a very honest man, surly, pugnacious, entirely trustworthy, a tremendous worker, putting through, with a touch of the heroic age, day by day, year in year out, the work of three men of this degenerate time. There is Jack Miles with his inseparable lurcher at heel, the satyr-faced old tatterdemallion whose career of oddly mixed good and bad ends in unredeemed loafing about the Dolphin yard and the slow soak of body and soul in "twopenny." There is Tom Gates and a dozen like him, "only labourers," chance workers at any job that barely taxes hand or head: thriftless, aimless, uncontrolled, drunk or starved by the chance of a fortnight's wages; an interesting class, a product—a portent, some will have it—entirely of our own making. There, too, not yet grown superior to the forenoon habit of his youth, is Mr. Alpheus Myram, their master—"employer," the wise it call—our builder, contractor and undertaker, a District Councillor and the people's warden, a man of views, who has dreams of a future for Sheringham and bides his time for the fair

opportunities of local government on the proper scale, when we shall be ripe for kerbed concrete pavements and a drainage-scheme—oh noun of sagest meaning! There are other workers who have no eleven o'clock recess, but are to be seen punctual to their hours the year round; old Abram Reed the walking postman, who has done his eighteen miles a day for twenty-seven years, shuffles down the road with his wallet and sack, to meet at the Crossways the higher official lately promoted to a cart and horse. Elihu Dean the carrier brings his van out of the Talbot yard and begins to collect his weekly chaos of parcels and errands for the county town, all sorted in that black bullet-head of his without so much help as a pencil-tick; Alf Tulley mounts the box of the conveyance which calls itself *totidem literis*, "THE SHERINGHAM BUSS," a hearse-like wagonette with a top to it for bad weather, and whistling to advertise the street, rouses his horses to a walk and departs for the railway station and the great world, four sound miles away. The doctor comes from the surgery, takes the reins and slashes the kicking mare whose play has been entertaining the street, and spins away on his twenty-mile round of cases, the rich variety of the country practitioner, amputation of a finger caught in a chaff-cutter, midwifery, measles, a typhoid outbreak at Manvil's Green, the end of one cancer case, and the diagnosis of another. The Warden, in his

pastoral capacity, comes back from sick-visiting in Jubilee Cottages, making slow progress up the street with many tacks and crossings, pursuing and pursued, hailing Mr. Churchwarden Myram from the Dolphin steps, or held for five minutes while Widow Roser, curtseying like a clock-work toy, pours out her interminable complaints and needs. Tomkins the constable comes from the cottage where the inscription COUNTY POLICE hides among vine-leaves and monthly roses; an officer stout and bucolic of aspect, but very effectual for good, in a personal and paternal way not perhaps altogether contemplated by the regulations. No sort of justice has as yet been done to the village policeman; the difficulties of his position, the importance of his personal character, and his influence, preventive and monitory, in all sorts of indirect ways, are still quite insufficiently recognised.

Now all these characters, be it observed, belong to the village itself—a compact and well-defined area in the midst of the real solitudes. Save on a market-day, it is rarely that the genuine rustic, the unmistakable weathered features and uncouth figure, to say nothing of the long leggings, the green cotton umbrella, the round frock, are seen in Sheringham Street. The division between town and country holds even here: in its degree, the difference is perhaps as sharply marked as in any other region. The two races seldom mix; the

older breed keeps apart, but is quietly disappearing before the new. We no longer even see the sun-bonnet of old Mrs. Gaston, which for a time defied the modern hats of her peers in the street; after six months' sojourn with her daughter in Jubilee Cottages, she went back to live by herself at Beggar's Bush, a mile from the nearest house. She could not afford to live down in Sheringham Street, she said; "you had to pay for everything you had there;" there was no windfall fuel after a gale, no chance rabbit from the keeper, no eggs from the half-dozen hens that foraged for themselves on the roadsides, no apples from the old untended trees. Good reasons for going back to the wild, no doubt; yet one guesses at other causes, to the full as cogent, if not quite so easy to put into words. The magnetic attraction which produces the Rural Exodus, as the tag-chewers call it, has its repellent pole, and helps to widen the gulf between old and new both ways. And that exodus is not only towards the large towns: there is a drift even into such a centre as our village, which takes a man from the life of the fields as completely and irrevocably as though it had stranded him in the Tower Hamlets. There is one way, however, in which our town and country elements mix effectually enough. Morning and afternoon there goes up or down the street the straggling procession to school and home again. Loitering as only school-children can

loiter, loaded with baskets, ancient umbrellas, mother's marketings, dragging with them babies committed to their charge, the rising race covers its two, three, or four miles a day of field-path across the swampy plough, of quagmire lane, of blinding highroad dust, as chance and the seasons provide, to and from the factory of minds, that they may sit long hours on benches under blank walls, droning in listless chorus half the morning, and eat their bread-and-dripping dinner and play their marbles in the street. And we, ingenuous creatures that we are, who think that these matters can be managed by the sort of brains adapted for Post Offices and Boards of Works; who, when we find our codes and methods have been entirely wrong for twenty years, allow ourselves to be dashed by no base misgivings about our primordial sapience, but rescind and remodel with yet more perfect certainty for the elimination of one more mistake; we, I say, are justified in scratching our heads, as I observe we begin to do, and wondering why the carefully selected syllabus of rudiments which the children are to learn and to be prevented from learning, should for once result in the precise character it was calculated to form.

I observe that my meditations in the belfry have a way of ending in criticism of fundamentals. Perhaps the sense of elevation here, the looking down—as one does from some other altitudes—on the heads of one's fellows in dwarfed perspective,

encourages the censorial twist of mind. It becomes time to descend and mix again on the levels with one's kind; and presently, when the last of the red-cloaked or long-legginged little school-people have straggled up the street and taken the country way home again by stile or lane, I follow their track to the upland paths and the wooded hill, to the beloved solitude and the secret guarded in the silence of the waste fields.

III

January 12.

DURING the past year I have a good deal improved my acquaintance with my neighbours, the Miss Walcots. This is mainly due to the arrival at The Laurels of Mary Enderby, a friend of the family in the third generation, on a visit which, the wise heads of the village declare, will last as long as the old ladies need any looking after. Mary is one of those plain, healthy women who seem to have been about forty as long as one can remember, towers of strength in all manner of domestic alarms, whose qualities of a certain useful hard-heartedness and a complete lack of nerves are constantly in request for the propping up and bucklering of more impressionable people. She happens to be a very distant cousin of mine, somewhere at the farthest stretch of kin ; but the fibre of the race is tough and elastic, and traditionally responsive to such strains, and we both acknowledge our duty to the family tree. Now and then I go to tea at The Laurels, and sometimes Mary comes up the hill for strawberries or cucumbers or other seasonable foison, and sometimes we meet in

the village on marketing mornings and walk a length or two of the pavement together. And so I come to know the ladies of The Laurels better than I had done for a long time. Of course I knew the sisters by sight well enough, one tall and something masculine, very old indeed, with that curious contrast of strongly marked features and vacant expression sometimes to be seen in aged faces, and with a manner whose unremitting courtesy was a little awful; the other, white-haired, and with the colour still clear in the wrinkled cheek, beautiful not only with the proper beauty of old age, but with a kind of afterglow of early light, slight, still graceful in carriage, shy, apt at times to be a little fluttered in manner. I knew all the oddities of character and methods of the pair which the village looks upon with a sort of proprietary amusement not far from pride; the daily walk to the post-office for letters, when Miss Louisa, in the belief that she goes too fast for Miss Fanny, paces the pavement some three yards in front of her sister, neither more nor less in their half-mile's excursion; I had observed the quaint habiliments, the wardrobe of an older day, upon which Miss Louisa's taste engrafts astonishing embellishments in the way of bows and ribbons; I knew the ladies' habit of taking the air on fine evenings between June and September under the clipped peacocks of the yew hedge in their garden (a little plot which is understood to possess a

peculiarly salubrious climate, not shared by any of the other back gardens on that side of the street), until at a fixed moment of the clock the damps begin to rise, they retire, and the house is locked and shuttered for the night. I have found them doing their marketing at Peskett's, the general shop, while Mr. Peskett matched their ribbon or weighed out their groceries with a fine deference not always shown to far more considerable customers. I have heard old Hobden, the butcher-greengrocer, recognising the survivors of an older race, relapse into a dialect almost forgotten in the village, and in the broader accent of the country forty years ago, commend to their notice "a proper mess o' peas; dey's 'Early Sunrise' from my own gar'n, ladies," or "a middlin' nice parcel of Iron pears what I've had off dat Ditchling party as you'll rec'lect." Something of the life within doors at The Laurels is also public property; one admires to hear of the rules of the household, the inexorable early hours which ignore the seasons, the stringent economy which counts the knobs of coal, and banishes cold with half-an-hour's turning of the mangle, if April make one of its bitter returns after the almanack date for the last parlour fire. Such characteristics as these I have long known and honoured as distinctions which help to give our village its mark of outstanding personality amid the grey monotony steadily spreading over the lower levels hereabouts. My closer acquaintance

with the garden-walk and the parlour at The Laurels since Mary Enderby's arrival has filled in for me the outline of well-marked character mainly, but not wholly, in the way I had surmised. There is, I find, at least one very solid ground of agreement between the sisters, in the religion of putting by all that can be spared from the slender accounts in order that they may do their duty to the family estate, and that a few hundreds the more may go to swell the half-million or so of the head of the house, a sporting Yorkshire squire whom they have never seen. On most other subjects there is room for difference. "They manage to fratch a little now and then," says Mary Enderby, herself a Yorkshirewoman. Miss Louisa was always the clever one of the family, the manager, the fighter when need was. She upholds an ancient standard of propriety which the village admires, but scarcely emulates. Miss Fanny is altogether of gentler mould ; her face, as I have said, is beautiful, spite of worn eyes and fallen mouth ; at times one sees in it something more than beauty in the customary sense—a softening of expression as towards entire rest, the tenderness which sometimes comes to people who have not been fortunate, yet have kept their thoughts kind. The elder sister's features, as far as I have seen, are set and fixed—a mask without the light of eyes.

There is no doubt that Miss Louisa was always the clever one. Miss Fanny was, I should judge,

never of too accurate memory or consequent reason, and she has had to give way all her life to the superior mind. She has not yet wholly learned to recognise her place, and still contends for her poor tumbled recollections and loose-ended arguments; but perhaps more from long habit than from any thought of ever having her own way. It may be that Miss Louisa's rigid accuracy is, after all, a kind of prop or stay against which Miss Fanny has leaned ever since school-days, and that if by any chance the prop were to give way, the infallible head be proved for once irrefragably wrong, the result might be disastrous. We talk, says Mary Enderby, of second childhood; but some folk have but one. The sisters have scarcely altered that standing and regard towards each other which their difference of four or five summers gave them when they left the school-room seventy years ago.

I pay calls at The Laurels much oftener than I should have ventured to do before the coming of Mary Enderby: the breach that was made in the walls to admit her has never been fully closed up against the world again. One drenched evening of late I found the ladies by the parlour fire, a cheerful blaze which had been made, I understood, for the benefit of the chair-covers and the books, and so could be enjoyed with a tolerable conscience. As summer wanes, the taking of the air under the yew hedge in the garden is replaced by

a long hour in the parlour before it is dark enough to condone the lighting of candles and the settling down to the evening's employ. As winter draws on, and the fire wastes the counted billets quicker and quicker, I understand that the grand economy of bedtime is advanced more and more upon the silent hours in which Miss Fanny dozes over her book and Miss Louisa knits without a pause. To Mary I imagine that this early retirement is her opening day; when she has seen the sisters safely upstairs, she makes her own world for a little, writes her letters, fetches down her books, or flings out for trudging walks about the village lanes. She does not seem to make many new friends in the place, beyond the Warden at the Almshouse and his niece Molly Crofts when she is staying here; and I think she is glad, in a way, to see me at reasonable intervals, and to talk out of our common stock of memories and traditions. She has told me that Miss Louisa seems to fail a little of late: once or twice there has been some strange fumbling in her recollections, when Miss Fanny might have carried her point in the debate if she had not been stricken with sudden doubts and remorse at the other's unwonted hesitation, and tried in a half-frightened way to prove that she herself must have been wrong all the time.

My last visit interrupted a difference of opinion about the wages of a certain dairymaid at the old home, fifty-something years ago. After the

exchange of our accustomed sentiments upon the season and the village chronicle, the argument was resumed, and Miss Louisa producing from a marvellously orderly bureau several bundles of old housekeeping books, proved conclusively that at the time when poor brother John died in the trenches before Sebastopol, and the legacy enabled the household to enlarge its borders, Bessy Chatfield had come to Wallcroft with no character to speak of, and six pounds a year in wages. There was no sign of failure in the way Miss Louisa conducted her case, nor in the lesson which, as she tied up the account books with their strips of list and put them back in the drawer, she read to her sister on the virtues of exactitude and a methodical mind. Miss Fanny took the rebuke almost as a child at lessons might have done, her hands clasped nervously upon her book, and her head with its little tremulous motion stooping over them. My cousin had shown signs of restiveness during Miss Louisa's lecture, and presently pushed back her chair with unnecessary energy, upsetting a work-box on the table, and giving utterance to that emphatic *Tck* which on a lady's lips has all the virtues of an oath. After the diversion caused by hunting for cotton-reels in far corners of the parlour, I took my leave, receiving the formal curtseys and the wishes for a pleasant journey and salubrious repose with which The Laurels speeds its guests. Mary came to the door with me; the rain had

cleared and it was a fine light evening; but though she stood a moment on the step and looked abroad, I doubt if she observed the mild dusk or the young moon. Her face bore a thinking frown, with a rather grim lifting of the lip, an expression which would have become Nemesis about to foreclose, and certainly had a look of Miss Louisa. She held out her hand with an abrupt good night, and went back to her charges; and on my way home I thought of times when I have seen her face reflect rather Miss Fanny's softened melancholy, and mused as I went on two sorts of destiny, and guessed at some prophylactic root of the Moly tribe which found in early days may preserve one's features in the pleasanter cast of expression when they have grown too set and stiff to change.

IV

February 2.

It is at this time of year that one comes to understand the fundamental charm of the country, seeing it in its bare elements, without the additions of spring or summer ; here, *rure vero barbaroque*, the wonted walks about the fields show what power lies in a keen moist wind, a muffled silence of the woods, a grey-blue distance fading into formless mists—a power of unity, of resting force, of fine searching air and even breadth of light which makes the thought of streets every whit as abhorrent as it is under April hedge-sides. The mind's contrast of this clear freshness with the sounds and smells of town is all the more vivid for the imagination of certain town-folk foundered in these drenched wood-paths, halting with a scared concern for their boots in the hollows where the drifted leaves half bridge over and half conceal the pits of water among the churned-up clay, in the paths where not so long ago they disported themselves, in the lightest of shoe-leather, with all the airs of holiday ownership. It is an easy digression, as one pauses for a balanced stride

across some wider puddle in Plash Lane, careful of the take-off on the poached edge, to think how this usurpation of footpaths summer-dry, paying no footing in November mud or February rime, figures the common position of the town intellect towards country affairs. The mind which observes our rural physiology and prescribes for its complaints is by a curious necessity the mind which makes expeditions indeed into the wilderness, but has its home in the world of clubs and cabs, among the fogs and the restaurant-fumes and the eternal ground-bass of the traffic. Such intellect comes down to the country with its capacious butterfly-net and its irresistible geological hammer; it collects its specimens and returns to its own place; and presently to us, wading dimly about our Plash Lanes in our winter solitude, arrive some of the results of the expedition—new laws and codes and economics, studies of land and labour, novels of rustic life—which we acknowledge with respectful wonder as to how it is done. It is clever beyond words. Suppose that I, whose centre is my cabbage-plot and my radius Plash Lane, on the strength of certain visits to town were to draw up regulations for the housing of the poor in Wandsworth, or to write a romance whose chapters careered through Park Lane, Capel Court, St. Stephen's and the Ghetto, I doubt whether I could manage to display a grasp of facts or secure a truth of presentment which would appear at all

magisterial to the critics dwelling within that radius of four miles. And so, with a rebellious fling of the moral sense towards an ideal of compensatory advantages, one sometimes feels that the solitude traversed, the cold-driving rain and the quagmire road taken on their naked merits, the mental dialect of the countryside learned for twenty years without a holiday, ought to have some make-weight gift—intimacy, one pretends to one's self, some small power of seeing the inside of things, exemption from the subtle blight which falls upon the amateur. But this is not to be pressed closely; there is a proper Nemesis for such aspirations; even that brief excursion into speculative morality may suffice to land one over-shoes, where all the reluctant tracks converge perforce at the stile into one desperate slough.

Plash Lane ends at Burntoak Farm; and when I come this way, I usually face the struggle through the last and deepest morass of the occupation-road and the yard, wipe my boots, after a preliminary purgation on the grass-tufts at the gate, on the birch-broom cleaner at the side of the porch, and pay a visit to the mistress of the farm.

It is generally allowed that Mrs. Ventom is a remarkable woman. She manages a large farm, as farms go hereabouts, incomparably better than most of the neighbouring farmers manage theirs, and her talent for business is looked up to with

a respect not far from awe. She has been a Guardian for a good many years; and there are those who say that she can do what she likes with the Board. Her private activities amongst the labourers and cottage-folk about her own holding are, in method and result, quite unlike the usual endeavours of our Ladies Bountiful. But beyond all this, there are personal qualities which make it worth Plash Lane twice over to take the settle by the down-fire, when it is neither churning-day nor Board-day, and poach an hour's talk from a winter afternoon.

No one would think Mrs. Ventom to be sixty-five who did not remember that it is seventeen years since she took up the farm single-handed at her husband's death, and knew that the pair were middle-aged when they first came to Burntoak from the other side of the county. The widow is handsome, in a spare, strenuous way; has the least touch of grey in hair as smooth and brown as a thrush's wing; the expression of her face, given mainly by almost the clearest pair of eyes I have ever seen, is one of reserved strength, wise with the wisdom that is learned and taught. She is apt to be critical, with a humour of drolling a little on the matter in hand, with occasional indulgence to motions of much-loved fence, bearing ever so little on the foible of the opponent. The expression which suits her best is perhaps one that has grown upon her of late years, a look of thinking

recollection, grave and wise, almost tender at times. Her manners are of that kind which people inexperienced in a lapsed world sometimes attribute to duchesses. Her father was bailiff on a historic estate; and a youth spent among great people—people who were great some forty years ago—with the "keeping of one's place" as a religious principle to counterbalance any of the common penalties of familiarity, seems capable of producing a notable sort of character—a race of stately housekeepers and grave dependents, of which Elia's Grandmother Field is the type, and to which our Mrs. Ventom, whether talking round the Guardians or standing over her poultry in the Square on Tisfield market-day, or receiving his lordship at a shooting-lunch at the farm, without question belongs.

She rules her work-people with a benevolent tyranny, kind but very consistently just, of the sort to which, if the ingredients be but evenly mixed, the rustic mind almost always responds generously, going back, it may be, to inherited traditions of bond-service, perhaps to conditions more fundamental still. The last time I was at Burntoak, she was considering the fate of Tom Gates, an odd-job man, excellent when sober for heavy haulage, for standing up to the knees in water through a winter's day at cleaning ditches, for all sorts of works where the brain can go to sleep comfortably. As Tom is very often drunk,

and when drunk is a mere destructive beast, he would have been turned off the farm long ago, but for the usual complication of a wife and family. We have in the village plenty of working men of his sort, strong enough in body, till the incessant swilling does its work, too dull-witted to reach even the lowest form of skilled labour; on the whole perhaps not quite so intelligent as, certainly far less profitable to the country than a well-behaved cart-horse. Tom, owing to his particular weakness, suffers (in common with not a few others) from inability to go up ladders, and is thus debarred from the several careers connected with hods and scaffolding. He is meant for drains and ditches, for the roughest navvy-work with pick and shovel; and at this his wages, if not interrupted by controllable accidents, taken the year round, with allowance made for average out-of-work intervals, would easily suffice to keep him and his family comfortably and to leave something over for the club or the savings bank. As it stands, he hands over to his wife, out of his fifteen shillings a week, seven, five, nothing, according to the liberality of his humour; the balance goes, almost intact, into the till of the Dolphin and the Crocodile. The first frosty week in the winter which stops ground-work means absolute starvation in the Gates' cottage; but, as Tom is quite aware, there is a special Providence ready to interfere at such a pass. This way of life, with an occasional

domestic broil or a bit of a fight in the street on a Saturday night, would hardly serve to distinguish Tom amongst a dozen of his mates; he has other characteristics, such as the keeping of a lurcher, a faithful beast that risks the keeper's barrels on Sunday mornings to get his master the casual rabbit; his language has caused the neighbours in a not too fastidious row to shut their windows during the dog-days; he has been in jail twice for assaults. Naturally, such a workman does not stay very long at one job; a day lost while the Saturday booze is being slept off, an abusive outbreak at some fault found in his work, and Tom is on the street again. He has been doing some draining at Burntoak and has taken the opportunity to poach the adjoining coverts during the dinner-hour; and Mrs. Ventom holds her hand, Justice brought up in her career, musing grimly on the customary complication of the hungry children and the tight-lipped wife in Jubilee Cottages.

It is a nice question; because, of course, every charitable penny which goes to pay the old score at the baker's, sets free another for the Crocodile till. The thick-witted brute perfectly appreciates the system of lady-visitors, their "tickets" and soup-kitchen, which enable him to lurch into the steaming bar night after night with a clear conscience. And certainly the anæmic wife and the five miserable children and the new baby must not

be left without a crust or a stick of firing in the house; impressionable people, discovering actual emptiness every way, have even ordered in bones for soup and a half-hundred of coal. It is a very nice question indeed, and one that ancient familiarity seems to bring us no nearer solving. There are the usual expedients; impounding the blackguard's wages, persuading the wife to throw herself on the parish and get her husband summoned, or to apply for a separation. Mrs. Ventom has tried these and more in her time; but what in the world is to be done when there is a capital traitor in the camp, when Mrs. Tom, an apron-corner to her face to conceal the traces of a black eye, declares she wishes she may be in her grave before she'll hear any one say a word against her man, or lift a finger to break up that happy home, and so slams the door on the black hearth and the empty cupboard, and leaves us to work out the problem for ourselves? It is not often that the mistress of the farm allows herself to look beyond the corners of the matter in hand; but the present case being apparently insoluble in practice, she for once indulges her imagination so far as to sketch out a fancy picture of a reformed local government which would make the hopeless nuisance a useful asset to the nation. There should be buildings and fields, she thinks, in every parish, something between a workhouse, a prison, and a lunatic asylum, where Tom Gates and his kind should be kept out of mischief and

made useful, without a penny of wages, fed and kept plainly and healthily, and put out to work in gangs under an overseer.

"And punished if they broke out or turned sulky, Mrs. Ventom?"

"To be sure! They should be well whipped if they misbehaved. Some would have to be chained up, as a rule."

"And would you allow them to marry?" I inquire.

"Well, some of them might; the best ones. Of course," she goes on, following up with some relish, I think, the deviations of her unwonted excursion amongst the foundations of society; "of course there are worthless women, as well as men, and we should have to have places for them too. And it wouldn't be only for the working classes; oh no! there'd be room for ever so many others," she goes on, in a meditative tone charged with occurring instance.

"And," I suggest, "I suppose after a certain record of good behaviour a man might get his discharge, and his full rights again?"

"Of course, if—— But the sort of men I was thinking of would generally stay there for good. And oh, the mercy it would be to the country and to all the decent people!"

"But think, Mrs. Ventom!" I interpose, gravely. "It would be nothing better than slavery. The Greeks and Romans had just such a state of things

—workhouses or *ergastula*, chained gangs, whips—they gave them some chances of liberty too; are we to go back to the dark ages of Plato and——?"

"We needn't trouble our heads about those days," says the philosopher, coming back from theory to life, as the maid announces that Micah wants to speak to her about his wages, and please what's to be done about the fence the bullocks broke in the middle meadow?

"Their liberty's safe enough nowadays. No one'll ever touch their right to get drunk every week and starve their families, and scamp their work, and help to ruin the whole country."

"I imagine," I said, "that the calamitous Tom has a voice in his country's counsels?"

"Of course he has! We have to thank *you* for that!"

"Us? Who?" I demand.

"Why, you gentlemen who arrange all these things in your clubs and committees, and take care that a brute like Tom Gates shall have his precious say in taxing and governing *me*."

"But I don't belong to a single committee, and I don't go to my club three times in a year, and I didn't even vote at the last election. And I am really in favour of female suffrage—with certain qualifications——"

"No, thank you!" says Mrs. Ventom, as she sees me out of the porch, and I prepare to plunge into the abysses of the yard. "No, thank you! Keep

your own responsibilities to yourselves. At least I can thank goodness that I haven't a hand in all the stupid mess we have to live amongst."

I had picked my way to an outcrop of the native sand-rock, which made a sort of island in the yard; and at this speech I looked back, with something in the look, I suppose, which applied the words to the brown swamp about me. At any rate, Mrs. Ventom took it so, for she laughed and shook her head.

"No, I'm not responsible for the yard either. That's the agent; he promised me the stone to mend it with last year, and perhaps in another six months I shall get it. I've written half a dozen times. . . ."

"If you were to *see* him, Mrs. Ventom," I suggest.

"Ah," she replies, "if I had him in my own kitchen! But do you think I've got the time to go up and find him in London? A big estate may be managed that way, but not a small farm, if I know anything about it."

"And plenty more besides small farms," said I, as I latched the gate and struck out into the road again.

V

February 14.

I MADE a long round to-day by Beggar's Bush and Nyman's Corner, and came back through the village as the light began to fail. We had a week of dark weather, with a restless peevish wind just on the wrong side of west, which would not let one be; but yesterday there were signs of something better behind it, and when about sunset next day the air fell suddenly to a dead calm, there was beyond any doubt the first touch of spring. Your cockney, who must have spring's coming burned into him by a glaring drought of May, would have hardly noticed one of the fine indications: the breath of the wintered meadow-grass coming across the smell of the dew on the dry road, or of the fresh-turned mould in cottage gardens; a subtle change since yesterday in the misty screen of the Park elms; the new meaning in the evening chorus of thrush and blackbird. There was a stir of spring in the street too; people were sauntering or talking at cottage doors, oblivious of the breath of heaven; there was a general sense of content and expansion of the soul, partly referable, no

doubt, to sensible promises of good times coming, when fuel shall scarcely matter, when there shall be full work at the shop and the yard, and the baker's score shall be no more a burden: but mainly, I think, unconscious; as much a matter of instinct and as little of calculation as the new richness in the concert of the birds. Every creature responds to the spirit in the air; Ben the higgler's old pony hangs his head over the gate in drowsy ease; the black column straggling home to the Park rookery across the rose and grey of the afterglow makes a mellower and a less solicitous uproar than of late; the school-children on their way home fill the street with livelier noise which the mild influence of the hour almost persuades me to think a less strident cacophony than on other eves.

As I reached the top of the village the dusk began to take a ruddy flush from the low red in the west; it was no direct light aloft on roof or gables, but a pervading rosy air, a suffusion that transformed the whole street, the church steeple, the timbered houses, the dark mould of garden plots with the snowdrops under the box-bushes, the faces at doors, the very cobble stones under one's feet. It was one of those times when a man slackens his pace as he goes, and takes deeper breaths, with a half meaning of making the most of a blest hour. The light was of that kind which puts the very best construction upon the human

faces it illuminates; and when by the churchyard gate I met Mary Enderby coming across towards the Almshouse, I began to myself a handsome apology for having in times past considered "strong-featured" a sufficient tribute to her looks. I could have wished to look into the rights of such a transformation; but my cousin would not stop to talk, because she was on her way to the Lodge. Molly Crofts had arrived that afternoon, and she wanted to catch her before dinner. She turned in to the Almshouse entry, and I went on up the street with a feeling that the bland Saturnian promise of the twilight was mainly accounted for. The coming of Miss Molly always seems, in a quite disproportionate way, to tune us up, to quicken, so to say, the tempo of our accustomed measures. I know that the Warden consciously heaves off a full ten years of his age, and sometimes a good deal more, when Molly is with him. Here is Mary Enderby over at the Lodge without loss of time, hardly stopping to speak to one—it was not alone that rose-twilight which so improved her looks. Do I not know that Harry Mansel will pay a call on the Warden to-morrow for a certainty? Shall I not see Lady Anne stop the old barouche, and hammer on the glass which always sticks, and carry off Molly with her on her afternoon round? Once more the tradesfolk and the cottagers and the children will respond to the charm which the

young woman seems to carry with her wherever she goes.

That charm is not a matter for simple analysis. Molly is twenty-three, and pretty with a prettiness that depends a good deal on lights and hours and humours, and something on a very sure taste in dress; her colour is not quite so constant as it should be, and I think there is no feature of her face which a critic—certainly not a critic with an Elgin-Marbles standard like mine—would consider more than tolerable, except her eyes, sometimes, when she looks at you; and when it comes to eyes, we Greek-statue people speak without book. With that catholicity of taste, which in a young lady so often fills me with envious wonder, she seems to read somewhat more than her peers generally do; she is rather less endowed in the way of athletics than they. When she is not on her holidays—and these seem to be chiefly at the Lodge—she looks after an ancient cousin in Wiltshire. Her likings—for dances and junketings, Oxford eights and Canterbury cricket weeks; her labours — conscientious needleworks and a weight of sponsorial and Sunday-school liabilities for her small Wiltshire rustics, are at the ordinary rate of her kind. With a gift near genius she makes what I understand are very spare resources cover her visiting and her dressing, and, I fear, the demands of two or three charitable leeches. I have heard several people call her "poor Molly,"

and the adjective, which in Mrs. Sims-Bigg's mouth would probably refer to the sort of dinner she was accustomed to, has a different meaning when it comes from Lady Anne. I make no attempt to analyse the subtle attribute, to guess at dim inadequacies or unlikelihoods in a character or a career; but I feel vaguely that it is just. What shall be done with you, Molly, in this ponderous, jostling world, you whose peculiar gift is a singular grace in small things? If any one ever lived to show beyond all shadow of doubt how to pour out tea, to manage a train on a staircase, to sit on the hearthrug and look into the fire, to make an unlikely petition to a busy uncle, it is Molly Crofts. If ever there should be an Elgin-gallery for such graces as these, Molly would have the throne in it.

So far I had got in one of my customary searching analyses, when I came all at once at the Crossways upon Miss Molly herself. Mary Enderby had missed her, for she had been foraging round the village to replenish her uncle's starved larder, and was on her way back to the Almshouse with two baskets. We stopped but a moment to speak, as she was hurrying home; but in the ten seconds or so in which I met her eyes, how my neatly parcelled analysis went to the winds, what a full revenge she took for my cocksure sorting-out of a young woman's qualities! The rose light was almost gone from the air, and it was fast darkening; but

there surely never could be any other hour so fated to bring out from beneath that mingled and varying prettiness the authentic sign of mere beauty. Whether it was the effect of the broad even illumination, or of some deeper motion of Molly's spirit showing in her face, or whether something was owed to a quickening of apprehension on my part, a remembering and comparing power, it matters little : I made a very whole-hearted obeisance to the vision disclosed.

I said I hoped she had come for a good long visit, and she smiled very delightfully, and said she thought a fortnight, and so we took our several roads ; and most of the way home I had the image of Molly before me. It was not the voice nor the smile that stuck so in my mind, though they came back with still renewed pleasure. It was a momentary meaning of her face in the failing light, and this given, I think, mainly by the eyes, a pathetic grace, a vague trouble which I have seen before, and thought to imply the first half-incredulous pity, for one's self and the rest, waking to the meaning of the world. It may be that such an attribution is only one more trick of an over-analytic temper, putting the meanings of a well-worn philosophy upon the fresh charm of twenty-three. I wish I could be sure of it. The charm had power, spite of philosophies, to make me stop ten minutes by the last gate up

the hill, looking back into the misty darkness and the points of light glimmering out in the valley below—musing, with a somewhat wiser analysis this time, I hope, on the elements, transient or durable, which make up the spell.

VI

February 18.

NOW and then in the round of the seasons there come times when I am inclined to admit the possibility of compensations for an indoor existence. Such lapses from the higher choice are not unknown in November glooms; but they are commonest in February, when the turning of the year seems to have come to a stand, when the forerunners of spring that had already begun to stir dissemble their daring, the crocuses shutting their pale outsides close over the deeper gold within their cups, the blackbird who had sung for a week in the elm by the gate moping with ruffled feathers about the lawn. There is neither sun nor wind nor visible motion of clouds to give the least sign of change; the garden plots are grey with rime, or half drowned in sludgy snow, and the last pretence at preparations in the way of stick-cutting or sorting of seeds has been exhausted. A walk, merely for the sake of a walk, through the silent, mist-wrapped fields is apt to become a too mechanic exercise, ending in half-conscious counting of one's steps, and the like dreary introversions.

At such times as these a tramp down to the village, with a fire-lit room and tea-cakes and small scandal at the end of it, appears a thing meant by Nature to bridge over her own hiatus, and I set out with a clear conscience for the Almshouse or The Laurels. The latter I reserve for the drier days, since the reception of shooting-boots fresh from the lanes is a pang which tries the courtesy of the dear ladies severely ; the Warden's ragged old Turkey carpet, and the muddy curb of his fender feel my heels five times, I fear, for once that I imperil the faded roses of Miss Louisa's Axminster. The last time that I went to the Lodge I found Molly Crofts in command of the tea-table, and had to meet with the best face I could put upon it the searching glance which fell upon my hobnails as I came into the firelight. Miss Molly pays a visit to the Almshouse two or three times in the year : if the Warden believes that he is giving her a needful change from being mewed up in a Wiltshire manor-house, and Molly knows that if she didn't rout her uncle out now and then and put things straight for him, he would be all mould and cobwebs, why, no one need concern himself to disturb either belief.

The dismal close of day was sufficient warrant for early drawing of curtains and stirring up of the fire ; and it was pleasant to see the light come and go on the books that cover the walls, on the black-framed prints of Bishops and Heads, on the

Warden's pipe-racks and littered papers, and, among all the bachelor trappings and the paraphernalia of learning, on the crinkled brown hair of Miss Molly bending over the tea-things. One perceived after a time, as men's way is, that it was a new set of tea-things, and that there was a jug of narcissus on the writing-table, and presently I observed that there was a fine new woolly hearthrug, and that the old capacious sofa was set at a new and convincing angle to the fire. All this tended to a feeling of not uncomfortable luxury, heightened by the thought of muddy lanes, by the sound of the drip from the trees outside in the dark and formless night; but when I said something in this sense, I found Molly in a contrary humour and inclined to disown her improvements. We were much too luxurious; why should we have all these things, while there were people close by us who hardly knew how to live? She had been, I found, into some of the cottages in Jubilee Row during the afternoon, and had found the Gates and Oram households without either bread or firing; the husbands had been out of work through half the winter, and Mrs. Oram's ninth infant had the croup. And on her way home Molly must have met with a tramp whom I had come upon half-way up the hill as I walked down to the village, a ragged, half-starved creature with one foot out of his boot, and his miserable pretence of a bunch of laces in his rheumatic fingers: the man was a

monument of wet and cold wretchedness, too beaten to beg, save by mechanically presenting his wares as we met in the road. And so Molly frowns as she looks at the fire, and gives us our tea as it were under protest, and compares the lots of men, and is, I think, for the time very sincerely sick at heart and angry.

It seemed that the Warden had met with the tramp on his way home from his rounds, and had walked with him from Ball's Cross to the Park. "He was a wretched object to look at," he says; "but I came to the conclusion that on the whole he was about as well off as I am, reckoning one thing with another."

Molly looked worlds at her uncle; but all she said was—

"And you did nothing for him?"

"Not at all," he answered; "I gave him sixpence."

"Gave him sixpence!" cries Molly, who has stringent ideas of her own about charity and "relief." "Of course he'll spend it on beer at the first public-house he comes to!"

"I'd have given it him for *morphia*, my dear," replied the Warden, "if I thought he'd have used it. Suppose that he is in the Lion at Nyman's Corner now, and has had his sixpennyworth, he will be one of the happiest men in Sheringham parish—far happier than we are in thinking about him."

Molly taps the floor with her foot. "As if you didn't know that I didn't mean happiness of *that* sort!"

"But, my dear, if you begin to classify and qualify happiness, as moral or otherwise, and so forth, we shall get into all sorts of tangles. Talking merely about comparative pleasure and pain in people's lives, you will find, if you look into things, that there is a curious balance or equality; much more than most people imagine. We aren't all organised alike, for one thing: that poor devil doesn't feel the cold and wet as you or I would after we'd done ten miles on the road from Tisfield Workhouse. That's his gain, the rougher fibre: and my loss is that I can't make myself glorious with sixpennyworth of bad beer. When we talk about all men being equal in the sight of Heaven, I never can make out why we tie the words down to one meaning out of about half a dozen, as if there were not compensations *everywhere*."

Molly only shakes her head, and has nothing to say to such a shocking hypothesis. But the Warden is launched on his subject, and turns to me, as one already broken in to the theory, and perhaps too little apt to shy at a paradox. It was the question of the equality of human happiness which first led him to look into the whole matter of the compensatory hypothesis. He made Molly fetch him Sir Thomas Browne's "Christian

Morals" and La Rochefoucauld, and read us two places—

"There may be no such vast chasm or gulph between disparities as common measures determine," and—

"Quelque différence qui paroisse entre les fortunes, il y a néanmoins une certaine compensation de biens et de maux qui les rend égales."

The texts were not unknown to me, and I once showed the Warden a passage almost in the same terms, but less peremptory, in my own La Bruyère; but like a wise man he prefers his own quarrying. Everybody, he says, admits the existence of set-offs and drawbacks; it is easy enough to remember that a fine-natured man has keener pleasures and deeper pains than a blunt-edged one; that learning and sorrow increase together; that children are hostages to fortune; and all the rest of the tags: but few people take the trouble to observe the actual balancings of loss and gain in historical characters, or among their own folk. And nobody follows the admission to its logical conclusion; it would be too nearly an admission of a governing intelligence for the schools in power just now. If any one cares to follow out the idea in other directions, he will find the balance kept everywhere. Look, at the present time, at the increase of the power of scientific observation, coupled with the decay of connective reasoning. We can afford to smile at the old men's facts;

but they would have made short work of our logic. It is not a mere accidental change, but a necessary connection of cause and effect; exactly as lenses gain in penetration, they lose in field and in the power of keeping several planes in focus.

I came in here with an instance in which I hold the Warden's theory to be absolutely true; the disappearance of the arts before the advance of the thing which nine people out of ten mean when they talk about "science." We are really a little too greedy, and want everything at once; we build, when we build seriously, with steel instead of stone, but we would like to think our new cathedrals as good as Salisbury; we have invented coal-tar dyes, but we grudge the fourteenth century its coloured glass; we'll have our process-blocks, and etch like Rembrandt too. The Warden accepts my little contribution to the theory, and tacks it on to his own position about literature. We have made applied mechanics the business of the human soul; and then we are puzzled to know why we don't produce bigger poets than, let us say . . . eh? *That* case is pretty obvious; poets are not like the stained-glass people; we see the scarcity all right, but we think it's only a temporary accident. Who's the man who said the reason why we had no great poets was because we could do without them? But to think of "science," of all things, ignoring the fact that

everything has to be paid for, to the last grain and farthing! The scientific people don't see yet that you can't fill hollows without taking down heights; they actually talk about "levelling up" and "levelling down" as if the two could be separated. And the social economy folk are for raising the conditions and enlarging the sphere and increasing the comfort, as if they had anything but the old world to draw on for supplies: they might as well try to create matter!

Molly, who had retired behind the defence of parish needlework, looks up at last from her fairy-fine seam, and breaks in upon her uncle's conclusion with—

"Well, we don't burn witches now, nor behead our enemies, or put them on the rack, anyhow. And I won't believe we aren't happier than when they did things like that!"

"But I don't know, Molly," says the Warden, "that they would have thought our blissful state of things a good exchange for their own way of doing things. I can't help thinking they'd have found us horribly dull and lethargic; they'd have kicked at our red-tape, I'm sure. They wouldn't have stood our placid oppressions and impersonal frauds, and the tangles of interest we lose ourselves in whenever we try to give a knock to the responsible folk. Take a thing like that open drain at Tillman's Green, that goes on just the same as ever, spite of all I've written and said about it:

to begin with, they'd too strong stomachs to bother about a bit of a smell, and if they *had* thought about it, they would rather somebody should be whacked or racked than let a whole parish be poisoned half their lives. I wouldn't go into history for comparisons, if I were you, Molly; keep to our own times, and think out what is to be said for and against being rich and poor, for instance—for being Mrs. Sims-Bigg, suppose, or—well—Molly Crofts. Think out the advantages of being young and quite old. Put one's degenerate mouthful of teeth against the pleasure of having them out under gas; or Mrs. Yarborough-Greenhalgh's At Homes against the ties of civilised society; try simple set-offs and comparisons like that, Molly."

Any rejoinder that Molly might have intended was prevented by the arrival of Harry Mansel, late from a ride. His well-spattered leggings received, I fancied, a less searching scrutiny than had fallen to the lot of my boots, although the lamp was brought in at his entry; and he was settled by the fire with a fresh brew of tea, and crumpets all to himself. The conversation split itself in two, in the way of congruity; Molly had to attend to the tea-things again, and the Warden had to fetch for himself the books he wanted to illustrate the great Theory in its dealings with the philosophy of history. As the pursuit of Suetonius, astray on the top shelves, was a matter of some time, I was able to follow pretty well—though the

forms and syntax have naturally altered somewhat from those of my own time—the talk that went on by the fireside. I take it as a very distinguished testimonial that Harry Mansel allows my status as a possible person. I have known him since he was a very small boy indeed, and the understanding which we came to at our first acquaintance has stood the shock since then of battles and many seas, and the wearing of the world. It is no small score for a middle-aged person to have a boy in his first year at Winchester coming over in the holidays to talk inexhaustibly of the affairs of life, not translating or making self-conscious allowances for the elderly outsider, but treating him, one thinks, almost as an equal, with the full vernacular and technics of the career; it is nothing less to have the boy, a Captain in a Gurkha regiment, coming in on his leaves from the Hills, as though neither time nor length of earth could make any difference, to talk in the old friendly way, not only unspoiled, but apparently unchanged by the sights and hearings of his large world. Harry was born at Meerut, and has all the happy address which seems rarely to fail Indian children; in him the half-alien grace has stiffened into a very pleasant sort of manhood. He has still a good deal of an early simplicity; he is not too clever; he has a touch of wholesome insularity, a wise phlegm which keeps him unperturbed amongst all outlandish distractions and lures. I

heard Molly ask him how it felt getting back to the Hills after England. Harry's last leave was decidedly a full and a gay one, including slices of the season in London and Dublin, with a Levée, Goodwood, Henley, Cowes, and a fortnight on the moors; but I don't think that Molly—who reads Mr. Kipling and has learned in the school of our latter-day empirics the proper relation of the part and the whole—I don't think she quite expected him to answer that it was all right, only everything there felt so petty and small after being at home. I once asked him, after he had come home on one of his long leaves, through China, Japan, and the States, how the fair of other lands moved him; and he said that when he got home he felt like taking off his hat to half the girls he saw in the streets, and thanking them for looking so unutterably jolly. To stay-at-home folk like myself, who spite of ourselves half believe the assertion of knowing people that we can't understand anything about our own country unless we go out of it, this sort of testimonial should have an inspiriting effect.

The Warden, though above measure a bookman, has (thanks, perhaps, to the great Theory) the saving sense to see that there are certain fine qualities rarely to be found except in conjunction with brains of the less adventurous type. He is always ready to take Harry and his kind on their own ground, and perhaps to fill up some of his

own empty corners out of their collections. He has told me that he used to meet, at College breakfasts with the Master, a famous historian who, if there chanced to be at table two or three undergraduates of the normal intellectual stamp, would keep his pearls to himself in absolute silence through the meal. The thickest-headed lad there, says the Warden, could have taught him something which might have made his great History a little less of a frigid vacuum than it is. For myself, I think a certain catholicity of personal taste in acquaintance, the gift of being a "good conductor" of sympathies, even a kind of universal menstruum or solvent of human nature, is one of the most desirable things. Few can be much further from this ideal than myself, yet even I can take pleasure in thinking of several people with whom severally I "get on" very well, the interaction of whose antipathies, if they were to be brought into immediate contact—the resultant extremes of temperature high or low—I conjecture with some solicitude. In few things is the possession of a polygonal mind more profitable than in this.

After a little, by way of counter-changing the conversation, I left the Warden busy with his recaptured Suetonius, and asked Molly to play something for us. Harry opened the piano at once, and the two conferred together for some time at the music-stand as to what we should

have. It mattered very little that they pitched upon some airs from a musical comedy which they had heard in London. Molly plays such things with a good deal of spirit, and with Harry whistling the air or humming the words here and there, and I nodding my head to the kicking rhythm of "Pst! boys, you mustn't make a noise" (or words to that effect), and remembering old, old songs whose tunes were so very nearly the same shuffling of the notes as this, the Warden was left very much to himself and his cross-references. But after a little I found I was not identifying myself with the modern spirit quite so completely as I had supposed; the pass-words had been changed more than I had thought since my day. I went back to the history, in which the Warden, pencil in hand, was ranging like a keen pointer in clover, and took up the ends of the Theory where I had left them; but having at last traced the reference which had dodged him through half a dozen indexes, the Warden slammed down the books and came to listen to the music. So I found myself left between the two; yet it was pleasant enough to see through half-closed eyes the shaded light, the serene hearth, the rows of books,—the sober company waiting to come in with their silent colloquy when all this cheery jingle and chatter was done. I think we all managed, in our several ways, to forget the forlorn households in Jubilee Row, and the soaked tramp on the road to the

casual ward. It was only when I turned out into the raw black night that the universal Theory came back to mind, and I wondered whether it would admit the possibility, in certain cases, of deferred payment of balances, either with interest or without.

VII

March 5.

THERE is, after all, nothing like the punctual recurrence of minor duties for preventing the formation of theories of life on too large a scale, the building of inverted pyramids in space. While the claim, six days out of seven, on the virgin forenoon is unquestionably Nym's walk, one is not likely to have many dreams about whistling the world to heel. Nym prefers the fields, with all their chances of the hedgerow jungles, rat-holes in the banks, rabbits lying out on the edge of the wood, to the prosaic highroad; and so at this season we tramp round the swampy pastures and scramble through the shaws, with such observation of the signs of spring, and such chance reflections as our devious wanderings and skirmishes amongst the underwoods suggest or allow. To-day we found a nook on the fringe of the copse we call Wopsesboorne—"Wapsbourne" is the literary form—which shut out the northerly wind and let in all the sun; and there we sat for half an hour, Nym content to be still for once, with his nose on his paws, while we thought our thoughts in the lull and warm air

of the shelter. There was nothing in the fields to suggest spring, except the dusky, almost blackish, green of the new grass, with glittering points and edges where the light struck: the larks sprang up with a few hasty notes, and would not mount, but drifted away aslant and dropped again in a few moments. Several times one or two of them hung almost over my head as I sat still, only a few yards away, and I noticed their wings, seen at full stretch with the sun shining *through* them; beautiful translucent vans that gave the idea, not of separate feathers, but of stretched tissue, "bent" like the canvas of a sail, pebble-coloured or pale fawn-yellow shading to grey; and there came a notion that here was a meaning for one of those seeming-otiose words in Homer, which one would so like to put the *colour* to—τανυσίπτερος—the sense of tautness, thinness, transparence, as of a sail in sunlight. (The authorities, I found when I looked up the word, allow at least such a loop-hole for the conjecture as no self-respecting critic would hesitate to use.)

In the midst of such ingenious recreations as these, I suddenly caught the sound of the church bell, a mere pulse of sound against the wind; and counting the strokes up to twelve and over, I knew that it was "the knell going out," and, by our careful country signal-code, learned that old Jack Miles had died since last night. And then one must needs be a little ashamed at one's easy-

going etymologic diversions. Our workaday life, with people we know dying round about us, comes back and turns out peremptorily enough such whims as what some one once thought about birds' wings by the Ionian sea. And so that matter flits away, skim-winged enough; and the burden of due gravity returns.

Of late Death has been busy amongst us, as we say: surely a quaint turn, this, to the inevitable personification! In a thinly peopled world like ours, where we know thoroughly by face and history almost every neighbour in the surrounding two square miles or so, death is a thing intimate and observed in a way hardly to be realised, I think, by a town-dweller. For the most part we possess a remarkably stoical temper, long become instinctive, a provision of Nature, as we say, to enable us to get through our work duly, in the absence of distractions found elsewhere. I was looking into Seneca's Epistles a short time ago, and being struck by the curious effect of nervous solicitude which those constant contemnings of death produce—a sort of "damme! who's afraid?" attitude—I thought how vastly better our country people have learned to manage it. They seem to have destroyed the last touch of terror by mere matter-of-factness, looking at the event clear-eyed, bringing it down by homely perception and more than a hint of the grotesque. They talk about it without the smallest reserve or

awe; there is a deal of meaning in the consequence of *the corpse*—often far beyond anything the live man attained to—and in the circumstance of the obsequies. What thoughts may come at the end to the spirit whose flame burns clear to the last flicker, no one tells; but at the least the method serves to keep a lifetime free from the disturbance of that particular fear, down to the farthest step which we can follow.

Last Sunday, a warm, still afternoon, that brought the snowdrops fully out, and set the blackbirds singing, half the parish was in the churchyard to see the funeral of Dick Holman, a solemnity which peculiarly satisfied the requirements of village interest. Dick had been a fresh-faced lad, somewhat overgrown, perhaps, whom we had scarcely missed from his work of road-mending before we heard of blood-spitting and "decline." Some sort of pathos touched the public mind, I think: a vague sense of destinies unaccomplished. Mary Bennett, with whom poor Dick had but a month ago exchanged the probationary "walking-out" for a serious engagement, was on the edge of the throng, in a sort of half-mourning, apart from the universal blacks of the family, unauthorised, but allowed by the popular judgment; tearful, but, in measure, with alleviating consciousness of distinction—such mercies there be of consolation. For a time, no doubt, Mary will make the pious pilgrimage to the churchyard,

which is our people's treasured reason for a Sunday afternoon stroll; unostentatiously, a little apart from the family, which she will, I conjecture, join on the way home, and be asked in to tea with. And presently there will be Sunday walkings-out again in other directions; and so one more experience added to the placid and commonplace understanding of a great fact.

Two days after Dick's burying, Rebecca Wickham, sixty-nine, with a grown-up family, living in all apparent peace and content with her old man at Dudman's Cottages, is found head downwards in ten feet of water in her own well. Some neighbour early astir (Tuesday is market day) saw her in her garden patch in the first of the dawn—"terrible cold morning it was, with a smart frost on the ground; he thought it was middling early for ol' Mis' Wickham to be about, but it didn't come into his mind again, not till he heard as how she was missing." She must have pushed back the slide of the well-lid herself; as much as a man could do, mostly. No one knows of any reasons; she had been pretty bad with the rheumatics, but had not much else to complain of, by all accounts: our cottage-folk have not yet found out that reason of Seneca's for dying because of the tedium in always doing the same things; the daily water-fetching and potato-peeling don't seem to give time for such fancies. And the old couple were well-to-do, according to the standards of Dudman's

Cottages. Strange, that the two daughters who are out in service had been written to, to get them to come home on the very day the mother was drowned. One thing clear—that she meant it; there was no occasion to draw from the well at that hour, two pails from over-night standing full in the washhouse. Between the discovery and the inquest, I think the neighbourhood lives in guesses at the motive and some sort of reconstruction of the tragedy, as near the dramatic conception, perhaps, as their minds ever reach—the sudden resolution; the creeping down the creaking stairs so as not to waken the old man; the barefoot stumble through the frozen twilight; the struggle with the rimy well-lid; the moment's pause on the green-slimed edge—all these imaginations react in a not unpleasing horror; and once again death's sting is soundly dunted on a solid sense of the real.

And now, to fulfil the belief of the parish that deaths go in threes, the sullen, surly bell tells us that old Jack Miles is gone at last; and some of us will be saying it is a mercy; and some that there's none to miss him; and the prophets who have buried him twenty times this year are finally justified. Had he died in his prime, Jack might have had a notable funeral, for thirty years ago he was cock of the village, the parish bully, the natural captain of the wilder spirits, famed beyond the bounds as a man of his hands and one that

never skulked from the provocations of the law. His was a sounding youth. He fell in with a gang of the navvies who made the first railway through Sussex and did so much to educate the natives in ways still to be traced. He was, when still a boy, one of the famous band which sacked the coverts of a neighbouring baronet, after sending the head-keeper a written notice of the coming foray. A born fighter, he had a full share in the battles which roused the Sunday calm of the village green ; he remembered as one of the great days of his life the opening of the new railway, when the countryside came in thousands as to a fair, to venture themselves on rides in open trucks, given gratis to mark the day ; when the Bolney cherry-orchards were stripped to heap the stalls spread on both sides of the line ; when the afternoon was given to the noble art, and there were eighteen duly formed rings to be seen at one time on the adjacent heath. After many a slip through the fingers of keepers and constables both Petty and High, Jack first found himself in jail for smashing a fine new shop window—the first sizeable plate glass ever seen in Sheringham Street—"twenty-five foot super all in one piece," he used to say in after-days, with the chastened pride of a purged offence, "and not a piece left as big as two fingers." His middle age was stormy and full of change ; a Herculean lifter of sacks of flour and sticks of timber, a prodigious worker when the

humour took him, he managed to live with a free hand between his outbreaks and his occasional puttings-away. He took a wife, and settled in a lonely cottage at a lane's end, which appears as "L corner" in the maps, but in the light of its master's goings-on found a new meaning for the customary aspirate of the spoken word. Not at first a drinker above the ordinary, Jack soon began to win fame for a heroic capacity for ale; the tale of quarts he could hold at a sitting, his feats for a wager, when he would drink standing on his head in the Dolphin, appal the degenerate modern hearer. In those days there was sounder, if stronger liquor to be had than the "brewer's beer," which—like "baker's bread"—is still a name of scorn among the older men, and it had its natural antidote in the huge labours of haytime and harvest, the moonlight summer nights through which Jack ranged the woods. He was among his other trades a notable pig-killer; and whether the tramping the country from farm to farm, together with the drouthy influence popularly credited to dealings with the insides of pigs were the cause; or whether, as most believed, it was that they broke the news of his wife's death to him too sudden-like; he fell swiftly to be the merest drunkard in four or five parishes. He ceased even from his spasmodic fits of work; he came before the magistrates for endless disorders which were very leniently regarded by no small

section of the community, and finally became a hero when, expressing the popular mind, he broke the constable's jaw with a brickbat when the officer was carrying out the new-fangled regulation which forbade the immemorial Guy Faux bonfire in the middle of the street. When he reappeared six months afterwards, there was seen an astonishing change; he took the pledge, and confounded the wise folk by keeping it without a trip until the zest of watching for a relapse was wholly staled. For eleven years he was the prop and pride of the local temperance platforms, an asset that figured perennially in their accounts. He married again, set up a pony and cart, and on that and his wife's mangle lived in decent prosperity, reminiscent of the old black times as from a safe haven, not without his own satisfactions. It was a point with him that howsoever many times he had read the deep-cut "Go, and sin no more," which faces the out-going prisoner above the gateway of the County jail, he "never was a theft." He held a notable position amongst the untried good, as one that had come back from the Pit, and reported of it much in the sense of the moralists' conjectures. And then, with no perceptible cause, came backsliding sudden and complete; the good years are wiped out in a fortnight; John Miles's name is crossed off the temperance books, and the cause reels under the loss of its standing instance. The little carrier's business goes; the pony and cart

go; the wife and her mangle presently get a separation-order. For a couple of years old Jack hangs about the Dolphin yard; a sodden, tattered old blackguard, the argument and pride of the graceless haunters of the bar, as once of the ladies of the Primitive Rechabites. For a time his head keeps its natural force amidst the ruin. His fighting instinct leads him to the village green as of old; if a degenerate race has sunk from the prize-ring to half-day cricket matches, there are still open-air religious exercises to be confounded with ribald noises, and stump politicians of either colour to be put out with interruptions of rough humour, couched in dialect of histrionic breadth. Five parsons and all their curates has the reprobate known; and all that their labours (together with the occasional shepherding of the Primitive minister and the Strict Baptist "supplies") have managed to instil seems to be a wavering doubt that it may be true about hell-fire after all.

Old Jack's tremendous constitution holds out through pleurisies and delirium tremens year by year, against the muddy beer and flaming whisky. He is tended by a great-niece, a prettyish, hectic girl, who, with no pretence of affection, very nearly kills herself in the work, and receives from the village opinion a curiously mixed testimony, part unwilling admiration for her sacrifice, part indignation against the obstinate devotion to an office "which she hadn't no call to do." And now the

bell is going, and old John affords a morality to all the thinking street; and Lou, the great-niece, will be allowing herself the well-earned reward of choosing not unbecoming black at Mrs. Lewry the dressmaker's; and one finds one's self wondering—the only matter of doubt remaining about old Jack's affairs, perhaps—what will become of "Marker," the one-eyed lurcher to whom the dreadful old rapscallion was all the world.

It does not need the knell thrice in a week to make the world smack of mortality more than it did once within no long memory. Without the argument of the final instance, one sees more and more easily the approaches and preparatories of death, coming about us like some grey, quiet lapping tide, reaching up here to sand and here to stone, touching and marking, over-running, uncovering, hiding again; through all counter-motions one feels the depth behind the lifting flow. To change the figure, it is natural enough that as a man grows older the blood should chill more and more readily at the great cold of space which lies beyond the frail partition of human needs and daily works, of kindly air and daedal earth; it is perhaps inevitable with men who hold strongly to the past, but have failed to link themselves at all closely with the interests of the coming generation. There are temperaments which lie singularly open to this influence—Charles Lamb's "poor snakes"—to whom the good world becomes

more than they could wish the sign of life, whose humours shrink at physical cold and dark, and respond to the passing of a cloud or the lulling of the wind in a way they would be troubled to defend. To such natures the motion of the spring is of course very significant; it is the forward lift of the waves, on which they let themselves go, to hang on, like Ulysses on the Phæacian crags, under the backwash of the "fall." It is the annual miracle which should tune up our religion; yet it has its own bitternesses. The contrast of the immemorial process with our own decay is too sharp at times; it is *the* primrose and *the* nightingale which return, signs which shall stand unchanged a thousand years after our last April at the copse; to lose our distinctions in the type seems to be beyond our reach. One may, when the humour takes, find a sort of calendar of loss in the very movement of the spring; on such a day the anemones are over for the year; to-morrow the hawthorn scatters along the grass. But spite of all such set-backs, the main purpose holds, the *vis vivida pervicit;* and the great argument from beauty in the world stands for the time irrefragable.

One side of the little nook in the wood where I sat was made by a shelf of sandstone rock, and as the pulse of the knell came dully on the air like a minute-gun, I found myself during my meditations mechanically counting the stratum-

lines in the stone, ticking off each stroke of the bell against a fresh striation. And when the mind cleared itself from a certain hazy lapse not far from oblivion, I found myself in possession of a very obvious, yet little used answer to some ugly questionings upon the subject of Time. Here is a man by the Ionian sea, who can amuse my idle morning across twenty-five centuries with a fancy about birds' wings; well, but suppose that at length the stretch of tradition fails, that all that world is whelmed at last under seas of black forgetfulness, when, as Seneca says, the profound of Time shall be heaped over us, while here and there a greater mind shall lift itself above the flood, and long hold out against oblivion, though doomed to sink at last into the universal silence. Suppose the heroic ages no more than one of these knife-edge layers, red or tawny, across the stone by my shoulder; Homer himself no more than a fine shell-fossil beneath a hundred folds of the silt of being; do we not feel the strata already heavy upon us? feel the mortal cold of the innumerable series of years? To such fancies the knell, counting the laying-down of the courses of the world, replies with head-clearing, sober sense, and hints a way out of our confused reckoning.

As the tolling bell, after its melancholy three times three and its count of John Miles's years, turned to a quicker stroke, "settling" to hang silent in the belfry again, I got up from the little

nook beneath the rock and turned homewards, trying to make a balky memory give the right words to the sense of that place in the Timæus—one of those sayings which seem to make a strange silence for themselves in the mind—the place which calls Time the mobile image of the Eternal, created together with the heavens, with days and nights, and months and years, and past and future, the forms of Time which in our forgetfulness we attribute to the eternal essence. And then, one text linking on to another as it should, I remembered pretty exactly that of Montaigne: "Dieu qui par un seul maintenant emplit le toujours." And last there came the rote-learned words: "A thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday," which some of us—Lou the niece, and perhaps two or three old mates, sad rogues, sheepishly strange in church—will be saying on Sunday afternoon, when the last of old Jack Miles's tale is told.

VIII

March 17.

To pass under the archway of the Almshouse lodge is to make an effectual retreat from the hubbub of the world. The echoing passage, with its vaulted roof and iron-studded doors, is a sort of ante-chamber to the house of peace; three steps across its worn flagstones take the worldling from the noise and stir of the street, the business of journeyings, marketings, politics, newspapers, to the haven where time almost stands still, and there is nothing to distract the day between the morning and evening chapel bells. To pace round the trim green square, to stop here and there for a word with one of the grey-coated pensioners on the benches under the rose-hung wall, to listen to the old humours and histories is a "change" such as is not to be found in many a thousand miles of travel, as men travel nowadays, taking with them the small remnant of accustomed things which they will not find in their caravanserais and convoys. Under the present dispensation the outer world has hardly more entrance into the Warden's lodging than it has into the almsmen's quadrangle.

Whether he is to be found in his study, or in the Green Parlour, the Warden maintains unfailingly the charmed circle against the spirit of the time. What we call the Green Parlour is a yew hedge in the garden, cunningly contrived by some old hand with curves and returns this way and that to catch every chance of sun, and fence out every peevish air: a shelter high and thick, proof against all but the most villanous north-easter, and roofed against showers at one end by the boughs of an unclipped yew. There are benches and a stone table, and a sort of niche or aumbry cut in the live green, to hold books or other refreshment. The Warden is a great man for the open air, and, above all, dislikes the superfetation of tobacco within walls. I believe, too, that he has some theory about a like redundancy in discussion indoors; at any rate, he is to be found in one or other of the nooks at the proper angle of the hedge, on most mornings when it is possible to smoke and read out-of-doors. I found him the other day in two minds, whether to stay in the sunny corner or shift for the first time this year to the shady side. There was a cloudless sun, but we had not had enough of him yet, and I gave my vote for the southern bench. From that vantage-point one looks across the Warden's lawn with its steps and sundial to a low stone wall, flourished with stonecrop and weeds, and over the ranges of the almsmen's garden-plots to the hayfields and hedges, the orchards and back

gardens that fringe the village street. It is a reposeful outlook ; the village life and works are scarcely visible ; only here and there among the trees the wood-fire smoke, a clothes-line fluttering its pennons across a cabbage-patch, a figure moving behind a gapped hedge, guessed at by glimpse of shirt-sleeves or apron as Mas' Tingley or Em Brazier. But to the accustomed eye there is parish history to be read in every sign. The festooned napery signifies the return of our friends the Sims-Biggs from town ; the old grey pony out at grass on a market-day tells us that Ben the higgler is still laid fast by the rheumatics ; and if Em Brazier likes to bring out her sewing to the bottom of her mother's garden-strip, to pace up and down in the sun and wind by the elder hedge, the observer draws reasonable conclusions from the fact that Tom Lelliot the cowman is cutting hay from the rick just over the fence. The sun shines pleasantly on Em's bare head and Tom's swarthy arms, and if an occasional syllable of livelier dalliance reach our ears in the Green Parlour, it seems, to my taste, to fit tuneably enough to the key of the hour. To the Warden these signs of life are merely teasing details, if they contrive at all to make themselves felt by his thinking part. He thanks God he is not a parish priest ; this year of duty taken at a pinch will suffice for his lifetime in that kind of experience. The Vicar will be home again in three months, and then he will leave the

work among the cottages, which he was never meant to do, and will get back to his books and fulfil his proper ends. He looks grimly at the prospect of the fold which he finds in such an unlikely manner committed to his care, the peaceful-seeming roofs, the orchard-boughs, the comings and goings of the sunlit aureole on Em Brazier's giddy head, drawing down his brows in a penthouse frown, and clasping his great thin hands across his knee with a nervous tension. I think I can guess something of his frame of mind—the self-contempt for failure trying to work itself up into a just wrath at the putting of the whole absurd business into his unwilling hands. I know something of other estimates of his work; I remember the wish expressed a few weeks ago by old Mrs. Francis, a representative of the more archaic ways of thinking, that Mr. Blenkinsopp wouldn't come back before his lungs was properly mended, as he had no call to hurry home while we had Dr. Nowell to look after us. Others have hinted a sense of Providential compensations alleviating the Vicar's regretted chest attack. I have put this point of view before the *locum tenens*, but I do not propose to renew the experiment.

Meanwhile, the morning's visiting resolutely done, the Warden sweeps away the recollection of all the infinite littles with a restless shift on the bench, which shuts out of his view the house-roofs and the garden-patches and all the visible

signs of his flock and fold. He had a letter yesterday, he tells me, from Blenkinsopp at Cape Town, who by this time is heading for New Zealand, and so may be said to be on the home stretch; three months more, and the temporary hireling will have the parish off his shoulders, and will be free to settle down again to collect materials for the Philosophy of History on a new plan, the great theory of Compensations or Moral Balance of Power, whose decent carrying-out and burial in his friends' libraries, with an *Athenæum* headstone, he will have us believe, is the remaining object of his life. No one, so far as I can discover, has ever seen anything of the great work. Molly Crofts, quoting a classic of her youth, says it's all his fancy, that; he never writes anything, you know. It must at any rate be all in his head, to judge from the way the theory comes in pat upon all sorts of subjects which one can talk about. He will just be able to hold out, he says, till the Vicar is home again. It will be high time then for the parish and himself to get back to their accustomed ways. I say nothing: but there comes before me the vision of an old-fashioned, gentlemanly presence, a little over-gracious and courtly in manner; of a daily walk as of one whose religion has lain chiefly in the avoiding of other people's corns, and derives its strength to a considerable extent from the recollection that there was a bishop in his wife's family. The Vicar must have

been handsome as a young man, and at times even now such a cherubic expression lights his face, at once infantine and paternal, that we forget that recurrent bishop, and the quondam curate who was also an Honourable, and the feminine entourage which feeds the dim mythus of a strong heroic prime in a manufacturing parish in the North, a cure which, but for a change of Ministry, ought to have brought the family a second bishopric. His face should be comely enough with its clear colour and shapely nose and white hair; but all is spoiled by a terrible mouth, slack, and wide, and flat-lipped, of a type which seems almost distinctive of elderly clerics of a certain school and standing; it must be formed, one thinks, by the lifelong enunciation of platitudes, and a lack of humour to turn up its corners. The Warden, with his shaggy brows and hook nose is quaintly ugly; but the small thin-lipped mouth, mobile with coming thought, twitching in momentary smiles, lifted in sensitive disgust, redeems the rest. If one wanted to find a "blind mouth" in the flesh, I think that that flat-lipped, well-scraped type would fit the case very nearly: perhaps the pattern was known in Milton's day. And though the Warden's tongue can be bitter, the cottage people respond at once, as they rarely fail to do when they get the chance, to live meaning and direct reference to their personal level and scale. Already they begin to look forward with somewhat doubtful

understandings to the return of the accustomed shepherd and the renewal of the remembered pabulum which some call spiritual, and to which some give a Miltonic and simpler sense of the word. This being so, it is perhaps only in the natural order of things that the Warden should be already fretting to hand back the responsibilities and opportunities of the sole charge to the absent priest. He was meant, he says, in all things to be a spectator, a wallflower at the cosmic rout; any earlier motions towards joining the dance have departed with gathering years. I can understand his feeling, being myself one of those who, whether at the solemnity of a subscription-dance or in the stour of party warfare, own a centrifugal tendency like that of straws in a water-butt to the periphery. I am with him, too, when he goes on to claim a proper function for the onlooker, the man in the mean state, immune from party contagions of the hour, free from the curse of impatience which *will* have the issue settled out of hand in its own sense. We itch to form our great-grandsons' opinions for them: we want our testaments to be of effect without the deaths of the testators. A thousand generations slipping on this side and that in a fatal relativity only serve to make us the surer of our own final capture of absolute truth. One picks up, says the Warden, a half-crown monthly, fresh and fine, smelling of printers' ink and of

consequence, and finds the universe recast by a dozen of ladies and gentlemen, most of whom afford an instance of the inversion of the primary meanings of language in the word "doubt." Well, says the Warden, he puts it all away, mentally, on a top shelf for twenty-five years, and takes it down again, at some more searching spring-cleaning, with black-grimed edges, smelling of dust and of impotence. Were these scrambling lop-sided theses in detestable machine-made English—mere flyblows of literature—were they the oracles which unsettled shaky souls, and encouraged the *esprits forts* to have another shy at God? Did these writers—the Dr. Macgurgles and Mrs. Alethea K. Bangses—persuade themselves for a minute that this dead verbiage, that stinks before the year is out, was speech that counts, the *haud mortale sonans*, the fated body which clothes all vital thought? Did they really overlook the eternal proportion between sound and sense? Did they never perceive the curious effect of their essays taken in the mass, their collective value as a symptom? How was it that there never dawned on them a guess of the tremendous solemnity of the performance, the fatal unanimous lack of humour, the provincialism, the mystery of vulgarity? All this made clear and plain, says the Warden, "pulveris exigui jactu;" think of ten years' dust on the shelf, and the thing comes down to its right proportions at once.

I had listened to the Warden's deliverance, as I have listened at other times, waiting till it should come round to the inevitable master-theory, more than half occupied, I think, with the interlude going on by the hedge, where the conference of Em and the cowman has certainly cost the country half a seam and a good truss out of the morning's work. Something else has gone forward, no doubt; compensations even here which might be hitched into the Warden's scheme, if he cared to look so near his own bounds. He is away again amongst the trains of thought suggested by those articles in the bottle-green review, the ever-clearer fact that there is no middle term in works of the human mind; a thing is either live or dead, it has a touch of Promethean fire or it has not; and if there is one clear fact in a world of fog, it is the visible seal of authenticity in the manner of a man's expression. Truth will not endure to be told in the chap-tongue and vernacular of the mob: she has her mysteries, her pass-words and signs, a language of her own, out of which nothing was ever yet said that mattered two days together.

I could not resist bringing in here my favourite notion of the working of that blessed sieve which drops out all the infinite rubbish of letters, and leaves us—if we are willing to stop at the last hundred years or so—the absolute and unimpeachable

good things sorted to our hands. The Warden nods and accepts my little contribution for what it is worth; when the great new Philosophy of History, built round the fundamental Law of Compensation, shall see the light, such fragments will be found ordered in their due station in the pile. But we shall have to wait, for a proper statement of natural laws such as these, till the meanest tyranny of thought ever known comes to an end, and an astoundingly simple *a posteriori* system comes down with all the dead weight heaped upon it. No chance of that in our time? Every chance! says the Warden: the thing has blown itself up too fast to stand; it has no roots under it, no struggles, no martyrs. . . . The sense of humour is not really dead yet in the world; we shall wake up some day to see the meaning of science hunting the trail backwards and losing its power of reasoning in exact proportion to its accumulation of facts. There's a day of reckoning coming for the people with bald heads and grey side-whiskers, and semi-evening shirt-fronts, turn-down collars, and black bow ties, who are called "thinkers" by way of distinction.

This strain was not altogether new to me; and I had been watching the almsmen in their garden-plots, who when the Almshouse clock tolled the dinner hour at its customary protesting interval after the church chimes, knocked off their feeble

work, and began to straggle towards the quadrangle. Some as they passed the end of the yew hedge looked towards us vacantly, some with more or less perfunctory salute, some one or two with the ingenuous grin of heartfelt recognition. I put it to the Warden that he had a body-guard, at any rate, to keep the thinking race at their distance. Ay, he says, and the best of them all is old John Blaker, who never could read nor write: and the next, Harding and Everest, who have managed pretty well to forget their learning. They are certainly a great defence; but even they can't keep people like Myram and Dempster out of one's sunshine. Dempster is the schoolmaster, whom the Warden observes with lifted nostril, in a sort of fascinated horror, as one might a curious and pestilent insect. Mr. Myram, our chief employer of labour, has all the heartbreaking virtues of his kind; the little man is rotundly prosperous, grossly well-meaning, a pillar of Church and State, such as our blind Samson of the polls already feels with twitching arms. Suppose, the Warden says, that the people who manage our country just now could be made to look at Blaker and Dempster together, and compare them impartially: he wonders whether even their systems would not yield to the inference. Perhaps not just yet, but they will come to sense in time; they are throwing over their eternal principles much faster than they did twenty years

ago. Some day they'll actually see that a man's real value is not touched by the three R's or anything else poured into him by Dempster and his mates. They'll put the story of Theuth into their Standard Readers presently, and will see that we are only worth what we dig for ourselves out of the stuff of life. And then, when the abominable tyranny of the press and print is knocked out, there will be wonderful times. In a thousand years? In a century! The balance of things is about made up, and the great year is nearly due.

And there, the talk having reached a familiar anchorage, I find it is time to be going homewards. From the square drifts the savour of the old men's dinners: Em Brazier has taken her sewing indoors, and the honest cowman is working with uncommon energy to fill up his tale of trusses, making the hay-knife flash in the sun as he digs into the rick. The school-bell jangles from the far end of the village, and Mr. Dempster is resuming his national function with the ladle and the jar. The world is spinning still, and we must needs renew our little vortices in its wake. But as I mount the meadow-path for home, I look back on the green quad of the Almshouse, saying over to myself the Warden's Montaigne text over his study fireplace: "J'essaye de soustraire ce coing à la tempeste publique, comme je fais un autre coing en mon âme;" and once more I

commend the spectatorial attitude, the taste for standing-out, setting one's back to the containing wall of things, and giving one's eyes their chance, at least, of seeing something of the course of time.

IX

April 15.

It is perhaps part of a backward-looking idiosyncrasy that in dreams I so often return to old neighbourhoods. I do not mean the re-enacting of the past on the remembered scene, which I suppose is one of the commonest shapes of dreaming; but the wilful returning as an alien to revisit the places of twenty, thirty years ago, the mind quite conscious of the changes but at the same time somehow forgetting the space between. In waking hours it is almost a religion with me to avoid the crossing of old paths and the opening of closed doors; but that odd half-brother self of dreams has no such scruples. Most of all in these visitations do I explore the gardens which I have left behind me: very rarely a shadowy Idlehurst; sometimes the shore of Sandwell dimly figured through the early mists; oftenest the domain abandoned in the middle years, when the lesion of exile seldom quite heals. In almost every case the garden sleeps in a rich air of content, and I pace about the walks, mostly busy with one occupation, the choosing of plants or roses—ghosts of

authentic possessions, most of these, but sometimes the mere extravagance of fabulous plenty—to be transported to the new ground which exists, in some serene confusion of ownership, together with the old.

These imaginations sometimes hold on even into the daylight musings, and the plan and lie of an earlier domain at times almost blot out the material beds and paths amongst which I walk. At its own hours the recollection comes, making nothing of the actual garden or the prospect beyond its bounds. Nine times out of ten it is of a corner of Surrey, half suburban in the sense the word still bore some forty years ago; of spaces of lawn larger than the chain would have accounted them, shadowed by a cedar, a pair of great elms, the relics of older state, shut in from the highway dust by a thicket of a hundred neighbour shrubberies and orchards, and by some remainders of wild wood—a purplish mist of boughs, thickening down the hillside in the spring suns, with here a pink cloud of almond blossom, and here a gap of April blue. The actual garden of the present hour is a steeply falling patch half converted from kitchen to flower quarters, fenced with a stubby quickset hedge, beyond which lie a slope of meadows, the river-valley, the spire and the tops of the village, the wooded ridges of the Weald, and for horizon the long grey wall of the Downs. To tell the truth, the landscape overpowers the garden; it is

only in the full height of summer that the sunflowers and hollyhocks and peas wall out something of the prospect, and give the plot a chance of being considered on its own merits. At other seasons the enclosure is too evidently a mere clearing carved out of the wilderness, and held as an outpost with constant watch and ward against the recurrent forces, the ceaseless invasion of weeds and wildings, of birds and beasts that claim their free-warren of the old forest and something more. In that warfare on my lonely height I sometimes think with a rebellious sense of comparison of other closes which I have known, safe shut in high walls, down among the neighbourly ways of men, where neither bramble nor dock, mole nor rabbit profanes the ground. Still, it is something to maintain one's post, spite of chaffinch and leather-coat and brown mouse; there is the long path and the cross path and the middle path for one's walks and meditations, with worts and flowers doing reasonably well in the brown loam, and the noble landscape broad-spread before one's eyes. It should not be easy for a man to become morbidly introspective with half the county in his view, and the village sounds coming up on the wind to suggest the busy concerns which thrive just below the hill; the war with the wild things keeps a strenuous mind in use and prevents the obese luxury known in securer places, where man is corrupted with peach-houses and terraces and pleached

arbours and vast gooseberries guarded under an acre of netting. Here the furniture of the garden does not encourage a fastidious temper; there is—to say nothing of marbles or fountains—hardly so much as a box-edging or a yew-hedge: there is no definite sign of antiquity, except the four tall weather-scarred firs beside the house, and they signify, if anything, the original heathy wildness of the hillside. The house itself, low and irregular, a patching of new on old, hiding its rough-cast and tile under a cloak of greenery where the conquering ivy grows year by year upon the roses and honeysuckle, lends no state to the scene; it is little more than the hut for the sentinel who keeps his rounds here season by season against the restless besiegers and the still sap of time. There is but one short length of wall in the whole garden—barely enough for a Noblesse and a Lamarque—and under it the cucumber frames, and the early border face the south. Here is a fine place for look-out and reflection in all seasons when we do not hold the sun too cheap. Last week I spent a whole morning in it, on one of those spring days which we call, with perfectly right instinct, old-fashioned—no mere negative truce with dogged east winds or seasonable hailstorms, but a blest positive in light and warmth and colour, which seemed almost too good to be true, and even went near to out-facing a dozen of the days of old, secure as they seemed in their prescription of

memory. On that one day, cuckoo, nightingale, and swallow came together, nearly a week before their time: all growing things—from the elm-buds by the gate to the seed-leaves peeping in the borders—had come on with a sudden stride since the night before. I had proposed sundry jobs of repotting and pricking out, with the lights wide to the mild air, but it soon came to sitting on the edge of the frame, and considering.

There was enough to think about in the visible world; the cloud-shadows trailing up the hillsides, while the woods gloomed to a massy purple or the meadows flushed from green to gold, should have been sufficient matter for a reasonable man. The rim of the Downs, that quarter-inch strip of pale violet air set over the strong painting of the middle distance, inasmuch as we know it to mean the five hundred feet of chalk hill, the steep grassy scarp of the fortress-wall on whose outer face the Channel breaks, dominates the whole picture. To-day the horizon wears a soft purplish blue like a flower's; to-morrow—if the present signs hold good—it will show a film of grey haze, the edge, to a sufficiently keen eyesight, engrailed with a running ripple of heat. In days when the air is dead still and clear for coming rain, the Down seems to come close up to the garden bounds, a dun-green bank, hard-edged and massive, showing every plane in relief, making out every gorse-tuft and chalkpit and white track up the Beacon, and the dusty ploughed

fields on its flanks. Add to these differences the effects of storm, of snow, of sunset on the hills, and a man might be content to take such a horizon for his park-pale, even for his prison-wall, if it must be. And if he should fret even at that limit, there is the freedom of the sky, the "flammantia mœnia mundi," which shut no one in; there is the inscrutable economy of the cloud-world, its marshallings and goings to and fro upon the business of the earth, its serene purposes and vast unity of intent. There is a good deal to be said for the man who of choice or necessity makes himself the fixed pole of his sphere and lets the vault with its vapours and meteors revolve about him.

On that old-fashioned April day I spoke of, the clouds were drawing out of the south, tall-sided argosies in lines and squadrons, here and there one of the dark keels unloading her treasure in drifting streaks upon the shining plain. Presently one of the great galleons came driving over the valley; one moment her tops towered dazzlingly in the blue overhead; the next, the gloom and the rattling shower were upon us. I took shelter under the old yew behind the frame-ground; and while I waited for the sun, which I could guess at by a whitening gleam across the rain, I rummaged over some corners of recollection—a confused store, safe bind, yet anything but safe find—which often affords good hunting in idler intervals. I tried to recover something of the frame of mind in which

as a boy I used to receive the coming of spring. I am inclined to think that to-day my pleasure in the shows of the seasons is stronger than with most middle-aged people, more direct and less associative; at any rate, I spend a good deal more time than most of my acquaintance in doing nothing in the open air: yet the best of to-day's pleasure is the merest shadow of the expectancy, the obsequious watching, the revel of the fulfilment of the opening year, which I knew before I was twenty. It seems wonderful, now, to think how little served to kindle the fire; some still noon, sweet with the lilacs in a forecourt at Casehorton, or Sandwell glittering through his weed-channels across meadow-levels, was enough to put the fever into the blood. One spring of all was the crowning time; one that seems, as I look back from this dispassionate distance, to have had no black days, no wintry returns, to have been altogether made up of such weather as this morning's hasty glory. Such suns shone then, and leaves budded in such heats and such bland airs as time can scarcely afford twice in seventy years. It is, I think, a special good fortune of mine that this annus mirabilis is mixed in memory with the thought of school-days. By some odd choice of the associative power the holiday outbreaks, the day-long rambles in Surrey roughs or chalk-hills, the fishing expeditions by Sandwell, have lost a great part of the magic impress, and rank with the ordinary good

hours of other years; the moments which still hold the incommunicable light were spent in morning school at Dr. Ransome's. The Doctor himself, no doubt, had something to do with it. There is no finer poetic justice in the world, and not much neater science, than the schoolboy's gift of sticking a fatal criticism—perhaps no more than a nickname with an irretrievable barb—into the one loose joint of the magisterial harness; but I remember no failing we could fasten on, unless it were a disproportionate mending of quill pens, a daily repair done with a relish of conscious art, which began with sharpening the penknife on the binding of the great Facciolati while the Doctor read the morning Psalms to himself and we looked up our Livy or Euripides. We had our encounters now and then; but the fundamental warfare of pedagogy, with its occasional awkward truces, was in our case inverted. We knew that our Doctor was on our side; we felt that he had not forgotten what it is to be a boy, had not taken that draught of Lethe without which, under the present constitution of things, schoolmastering seems barely possible. One understands now what at times perplexed us then—his sudden attention to a venturesome rendering, after a bare patience with the decent dictionary work. Spite of the way—almost like conjuring—in which he got meaning out of the seeming-nonsense chorus-lines, there were times when he went back, as I judge, to

his own first wrestlings, and we felt that at bottom they *were* nonsense, after all. I remember, in an odd way he had of making a sort of musing excursus on our construes, as much to himself as to us, his contempt for that place in the *De Senectute* which disparages the desire to recall childhood and youth in later age. In his own temper he had kept the sense, at least, of the early secret; this rarest gift of memory was the lien between us, a main part of the spell which fashioned those good recollections at school. There was also something in the place and the manner of it. The garden was the schoolroom all through a time of seraphic summer mornings, the work like some more virtuous holiday. It made no little difference to the digestion of our dialogue or our play that they came to us with the association not of inked desks and map-hung walls, but of waving fields and shining skies, the page chequered by the sun through the boughs stirred by the south wind, the strophes tuned to the sound of bees about the flower-plots. Something of the warmth and life of those June mornings, when the Doctor heard us under the oak that stood between the garden and the hayfields, or in more burning hours in the black shadow beneath the great cedar on the lawn, went into our classics; and something, at least, remains. Wet days there were, doubtless, and desperate aorists and iron-hearted rectangles to balance the good hours; but their memory is

general, sunk into the undistinguished sea of young troubles; by a memorable grace it is the serene days which emerge. When September mornings left the rime too late for us by the oak tree, the study was not so ill a prison-house. Through the French windows the landscape was there, the lawn, the leafless thickets waiting to kindle again with the spring, making backgrounds for Medea or Antigone in our work, for Knights of the Table and Ladies of Shalott in my private excursions from the text before us; backgrounds at times, perhaps, for visions of adventures yet to come, conquering returns on some day of surpassing summer from scholarship-quests or deeds of yet higher emprise. Most of our company, I think, did not lack in such dreams the image of a sovereign lady. I at least owed service to both the princesses of the house, the dark and the fair, who often afar and sometimes by chance encounters in nearer presence shone upon our workdays; first, for a little, I was slave to flaxen-haired Lyddy, the blue-eyed fairy of sudden friendly smiles; but soon, and deeply indeed, to proud Letty, who held all the Doctor's boys as foes of the house, a hateful stone-throwing, kitten-teasing race, to be passed by with high-carried head or warred down with terrific scorn of brave brown eyes. And even without such alleviations as these, the Doctor's study was in itself a friendly place: the panelled walls with their black-framed

Sir Joshua mezzotints, the bookcases topped by the Homer bust and the Theseus with his broken-nosed inscrutable smile at our Attic efforts, the long table, its bottom bar well worn by generations of restless boot-heels, the rich atmosphere of the Doctor's birdseye over all; these made up a cheerful spell only second to the garden-hours, the light which flickered through the oak-boughs, the warm south which twirled the pages, and sang through the pipe of Pan with all the concert of June.

Before I had got thus far in my reconstitution of history, the shower was over and the sun ablaze through the drip of the trees. I stood for another five minutes under the yew to hear the blackbirds break into song as the storm went by, thinking how much of all the gloryings of those old springs came out of the days that were then to be, kindled by a sun yet below the hills. And since now for so long a time all the best of April seems to link itself with the days behind, I began to explore the tract where the change befel, the break between that forward and this backward-looking pleasure: and I think I could have fixed the time of that conversion or catastrophe, if the precision had been desirable, within a matter of days. A blackbird sang on such a morning as this thirty-something years ago, and the praise I gave him was mainly for the promises he seemed to make me; to-day the gold-mouthed cheat does but pay me

back my own treasure that I gave him when he seemed to offer all the world worth the having. There is a frame of mind which can take a sort of sentimental pleasure in acknowledging a cheat like this, which cultivates an actual distaste for successes and gains. But it is one which may easily lose the wholesome balance of things; and it is good to let the influences of the right April days rout the mild-minded melancholy as they very well know how. There is no waste; those early transports were not meant only to tickle the susceptibilities of leisurely middle age; they screwed up into accord certain strings, we will suppose; the instrument once in tune may be laid aside for the present; and when on spring mornings the stirring of the new life reaches it through windows seasonably wide, some sympathetic vibration of keynote making response, may give forth from the shelf where it lies, echoes of the concert in the outer world.

X

April 22.

YESTERDAY the nightingales began to sing in earnest. For a week past a scolding churr as one crossed the end of a copse, a few low notes, a sotto voce rehearsing of the cadences, when the keen wind had dropped in a misty twilight; the sight, even, of the unmistakeable red-brown plumage amongst hazel-boughs, told us that they were here. But until a restless north-easter, with leaden sky and a smoky haze across the valley, had tired out its spite and shifted south-westerly, they, with all the other wild things, waited and were still. Yesterday the change came; after a night of blowing rain we woke to soft southern airs, and the breathing warmth which draws all the sweetness from the grass and mould. When the sun broke out through slow-sailing clouds, the dripping woods flushed with a moist heat which brought out the bluebells and anemones almost under one's eyes. The nightingales took their part in the outbreak of pent-up song; but all day they were scarcely to be heard for the hubbub of the tits and finches; and even at the vesper hymn the blackbirds and

thrushes sang them down. It was only after dark, in the first rich stillness of the night, all balm and mildness and content, that they had their hour; there were seven or eight of them, perhaps, within earshot, answering each other from copse to copse, each in its wonted station, palm-clump or hazel-alley, from which the song has pealed every spring of the thirty or so within my memory of this neighbourhood.

It has been a habit of mine ever since I was a boy, to look out of window at the night, the last thing before turning in, to see how the weather shapes, where the wind sits, whether the stars are right in their courses, before leaving the world to go its own gate till morning. At my last look-out yesterday the night was starry and clear; Altair in the Eagle hung just clear of the tall elm by the garden gate; and in the budding branches sang the nightingale as it has sung on spring nights as long as I have known the tree. I believe that, as a fact, the numeric bird does come back to the same bush and bough during its lifetime; "Le chantre rossignolet," as Ronsard says—

> ". . . vient loger
> Tous les ans en ta ramée,"

and again—

> "Gentil rossignol passager
> Qui t'es encor venu loger
> Dedans ceste fraische ramée
> Sur ta branchette accoustumée . . ."

but that does not greatly matter. The nightingale is immortal; it is nothing to the point to know whether the bird that sang here last year fell a prey to some grimalkin in Tangier or Fez; the fact stands that the song breaks from the tree as punctually as Altair glitters over it. There is much matter in this parallel of migration, suggestions to be slackly followed out, as one leans with one's elbows on the window-sill, breathing the divine tenderness of the night, kept out of bed by that poignant lullaby from the elm-boughs. If the little brown bird and the star keep tryst thus, what accord of cycle and epicycle may not be predicable in our own sphere?

Listening to the rich variety of the song, the long-drawn stealing fall, the marvellous liquid shake, the force in the outburst of keen *martelé* notes, familiar for forty springs, yet year to year a still fresh wonder, I felt once more the impression of the duration of life which—rather than that of its transience—grows upon me as the seasons add themselves. We hear more than enough, I think, about vicissitude, the mutability of fortune, and the like; little or nothing concerning the difficulty (as I see it) in believing that anything of the setting and circumstance of our life can ever change. In the matter of acquaintance and of neighbourhood, my own strand of experience has been broken off and knotted on again perhaps as much as most men's; but the trouble which I find

is the keeping one's self awake to the truths of lapse and loss under the lulling persuasiveness of those immoveable common things that at once shut in and sustain our being. I find this difficulty not only in the punctuality of constellations and nightingales, but in the most trivial details of one's own concerns. I sit in my accustomed place in church for so many years, and the chisel-marks on the pillar before me—not learned by heart, as it may be with some men, in slumbrous Sunday afternoons of childhood, but known for a mere broken length of later years—seem to assert a fixity for which their five centuries' clean-cut graving is only a symbol. I make one of my rare visits to town; and, sauntering as my wont is along the line of well-remembered daily walks, I find again at a certain street corner the rich cosmetic atmosphere, the breath of macassar which hung there half a life ago, about the very shrine of barberdom. A little farther on I stop in a narrow alley before a printseller's window; and lo! there is the very etching of Water Meadows, the reeds, the ragged poplars, which used to draw me across the pavement day by day, a kind of revelation to eyes opening somewhat blinkingly on new aspects and perspectives of the world. Even in humanity I find a sort of stay or arrest of Time's hand, contrary to all the book-rules; the proportion of my acquaintance who "never look a day older" is quite a large one. If I go to Oxford, there is

always Kelly in the lodge—red, Irish, military, clean as a new banknote, enormously respectable: there is the Dean, crossing the street, small, shrivelled, with the historic shepherd's-plaid trousers, and the top hat on the back of his head, his soul browsing in the Anthology, the musing eyes focussed now and then with an effort on such outer phenomena as tramcars or bicycles. Neither he nor Kelly shows a wrinkle the more; and it is a surprise which I never quite get rid of, that neither Dean nor Porter sees in me the down-chinned, raw-boned undergraduate of a mere hundred terms or so since. The negative instances which occur somehow fail to produce a proportionate effect. Hicks the Bursar's once raven beard is now nearly white; but that is a mere accident of matter: one is assured that Hicks's lectures on political economy have suffered no change. And the Master has certainly been dead these three or four gaudies; one reads the gilt lettering, already a little tarnished, on his marble in the ante-chapel, but with a mind that does not fix itself on the subject. As I said, it seems that in these matters it is only the positive phenomena which have weight. I will not insist that this way of looking at the world may not spring from a congenital twist of the perceptions, and I will grant that the ultimate catastrophe may be all the more impressive for a lifelong obstination in the contrary sense; but I honestly think that as a rule

we allow too little for the effect of the security bred in us by a view of life's continuity. I came the other day on the chapter in Seneca which moralises about the burning of Lugdunum, with all its marshalling of the vicissitudes of existence, like a schoolboy's essay. It would be some solace, he says, for the briefness and feebleness of our days, if things decayed as slowly as they are matured; as it is, increase is laboriously wrought out, but all things haste towards extinction. It depends, perhaps, very much upon the point of view. I once found on a tree in an old orchard, clear and strong, expanded to a sort of grotesque emphasis, the initials which I hacked out in some couple of minutes' playtime when I was at school. In the same way, a single breath serves for half a dozen words which sting the heart without pity after fifty years' repentance. Of course, when the Stoic goes on to reckon up exile and torture along with sickness, war and shipwreck, as common chances of life, we must admit he has an argument which we have lost. Perhaps we do not generally give all their due to those old Romans who so seldom died in their beds: one may speculate, in passing, what differences it might make in the public men of our day if the dissolution of a ministry involved that of its members, and if their ultimate probability were poison instead of peerages. But Seneca's tale of wrecks, burnings, earthquakes, floods—he died, be it noted, some fourteen years

before the catastrophe of Pompeii—can hardly have had much more weight in Italy in his day than it would have in England now. It is the very ratio of such *discrimina rerum* to the common tenor of the world, which makes for that lulling security of daily life. And perhaps—to vent an old spite of mine on the race of most compendious liars which the world has ever seen—it is the very insistence of the common type of moralists on the transience of things which is answerable for the recoil towards too large a faith in their stability. "Nil privatim, nil publice stabile est," says the philosopher; and we deliberately stiffen our trust in Greenwich time, the Bank of England, and the like fixities of the universe. In all things, says the philosopher, we are to look before us and excogitate not what usually happens, but what may possibly come to pass. It is a precept whose observance might save us a good deal of trouble; and as I turn away at last from the window, I consider that before the circle is complete again this time next year, Altair may have exploded upon space, and the whole race of nightingales may have died of broken heart. But that injunction does not make sufficient allowance for the force of common life, a lulling enchantment beyond any that philosophy knows. It would be nearer the mark to insist on the continuance of life about us and our own transience amongst it; to think of ourselves as held a moment in the vortex of the

spinning orb, and then flung out at a tangent, as alive this spring in every nerve to the pulse of the white fire and the thrill of the voice in the dark, in a few more Aprils taken away from the coming together of the star and the bird. As I left the window, there came something of a rebellion I have felt before at such seeming disproportion of sentiment, a pathos with something like a touch of jealousy in it, a new meaning to "still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain"—only to be borne by the help of an old surmise that such puttings-forth of beauty as these, the things which at every turn we must look at and listen to and leave with a helpless pang, are but the last vibration of the central light; the belief, or the will to believe, that all the good and fair things which our life ever and again presents, half-shown and withdrawn while scarcely grasped, all the broken lights, the suspensions and discords are but slight motions of the reality about us, felt as the world is felt by the first momentary sallies of the child's perception—vague pictures, as in a dream, with long interspaces of nothingness. There is a way in which we may think of these intuitions as at once fantasy and truth: a way figured by the chance of a dream I had at nightingale-time last year. In that last strange state, when the dream thins away like morning mist before the quickening warmth of life, and for a moment we hang somewhere between two worlds, I thought I was

in a rich Eastern garden, listening to the nightingale among blossomed thickets, and watching a point of light which shone from the top of a vast, shadowy building—mosque or dome, divined rather than seen amongst black groves of cedar. This light had a pulsation in its flame, which seemed to keep time with the throb of the pealing voice; connected with it (as I said to myself, with the fantastic precision of words we sometimes find in dreams), by some strange relation of a cycle of rhythms. Then, as the slowly clearing mind came awake and felt, so to say, for its bearings in the world of sense again, the dark corners of the room and the faintly glimmering square of the window, there was the matter which the half-quickened fancy had wrought upon: the star hung glittering over the dark mass of the elm, and the song pealing from its boughs had at once broken and avouched the dream.

XI

May 12.

I TOOK the Warden with me lately in one of my cross-country walks, seven miles by field-path and wood, gate and stile, without a step on the high-road. In the days of my youth I tramped the highways to some purpose; I have the Ordnance map of more than one county, on which the red-inked record of travelled roads makes a pretty close network. But altered conditions of traffic have turned me off the Macadam and into the fields; and thus late do I begin to discover the full charm of the innumerable tracks and paths in which a man can saunter and muse if he will, unvexed by dust-clouds and the rules of the road. I am already coming to regard the highway, when I chance on it in my rambles, as "pays suspect" much as do the wild things, stoat or rabbit, looking cautiously up and down it, and scuttling across it into the safe covert of the green depths on either hand. The brooding quiet of some woodland hollow is all the deeper for the noises which faintly reach it from the London road, the howl of flying gears, the hoarse quack as of some great obscene bird,

The way I took led through a succession of copses, some of which had been cleared this spring of their underwood. The Warden was for grumbling at the destruction; and at first sight the bald slopes of trodden ground, with hardly a primrose to grace them, littered with twigs, and rough with the hacked stubs, contrasted unhappily enough with the untouched thicket, where the hyacinths clothed the ground with living blue—a sapphire with a greenish underplay—and the galaxies of the stellaria shone along the banks. But, as I told the Warden, it is precisely to the rigid system of periodical clearing that we owe the incomparable beauty of our sylvan springs. Where a wood has been left to itself for thirty years, the explorer, if he can force his way through the thicket, will find the ground bare and dead, all growth stifled by the green roof overhead. But when the woodmen have lopped the glades, and have thinned the larger timber in places, even the first year there is a flush of life that has lain dormant there, trails of ground-ivy and spurges uncurling; the second year the primroses have lodged themselves all over the cleared ground; the third spring they are in their glory; and before the stubs of the underwood have sprouted again to more than a spare covert, the bluebells have run together from groups and scatterings here and there to isles and continents of heavenly colour. Just for the moment, when

one finds the billhook levelling a favourite shaw and opening the secret alleys to the common day one grudges the change, and says something to one's self of the *lucum ligna* kind; but when one has seen this harvest of the woods, the cycle of growth, and clearance at work for the best part of a lifetime, and observed the delight of Nature in clothing the fresh ground, and all her degrees of changing beauty till the copse stands thick and green again, one recognises the woodman as no mean artist, and feels how intimately human handiwork has become part of the most characteristic English landscape.

In Horse Wood we found John Board, a hereditary billman, and his mate busy among the underwood, beside their rough-built shelter with all their tackle about them—stick-faggots, ether-boughs, thatching-rods, cleft oak for wattles. The fire under the kettle sent a drift of blue haze across the clearing, and the two men were just ready to knock off for dinner. Their life is astonishingly simple and archaic, and one of the wholesomest in the world; dry-shod in dead leaves and fern while the ploughman splashes along the drenched furrows, snug by the stick fire in the lew hollow while the snow-wind nips the shepherd on the down, these "leather-legged chaps," the "clay and coppice people," as Cobbett called them, are still, as they were at the time of the "Rural Rides," most favoured of all who live on the land. The billhook

is almost the only tool they need; a felling-axe may be wanted for the larger saplings, and a draw-knife for shaving the thatching-rods; the wood itself furnishes all the rest: chopping-blocks, levers, wedges, bonds for the faggots, are all made as they are wanted from the material everywhere lying at hand; the little "lodge" or shed for rough weather is built of faggots and thatched with hoop-shavings. Nothing is wasted; the very chips and litter make the fire over which the kettle sings, hung on a handy hazel crook stuck into the ground.

We sat a few minutes on a pile of faggots to pass the time of day with John Board, a small, shrivelled greybeard, keen-eyed, spry to the last degree, tongue-free, the captain of all woodcutting hereabouts. His mate, Luke Holman, a heavy-shouldered giant, taciturn and impenetrable, tended the fire with his back towards the conversation. In the upper wood a number of sizeable oaks had been "thrown and flawed," and the men had been busy putting up the dried bark into bundles. Chichester, or Horsham, it was going to, said old John; he didn't know which; it was the same man had the tanyard at both on 'em. How was the bark selling? Why, better than what it was a year'—two ago; they seemed to reckon as they couldn't do without it, after all. It wasn't anything like what he could remember, but better than what it was the last time they was throwing

in Horse Wood; then they didn't flaw anything smaller than your wrist, but now you'd got to go middling far up the spray.

The Warden asks if old John knows where the leather goes to when it comes out of the tanyard? Old John shakes his head: London, he 'spects . . . mos' things goes to London now. And not so long ago, the Warden asks, there were tanyards in almost every village? There was that, replies the woodman: he could recollect them working at Arn'ton and Shern'am up till 'sixty, pretty near.

"And you could know where your leather came from then, and could know that it *was* leather?" asks the Warden again, looking meditatively at a cracked boot-upper. Oh, ay, there wasn't much of this here truck that rots as soon as ye starts wearing of it; 'twas all oak-bark then. And he 'spects people can get it now—them as reckons to have good stuff. The Warden nods reflectively: "them as reckons to have good stuff," he murmurs to himself, as a fruitful summary of the whole matter. We left the woodmen to their refection, earned as not many lunches are earned, taken in serene leisure, after a rub on the corduroys of the palms scored and blackened from the hazel bond, in the snug lee of the faggot pile, with the boot-heels stretched luxuriously into the hyacinth carpet, with the sunlit woods misting drowsily through the blue haze from the fire. In the upper wood we found havock to dismay at first sight even a man

used to the woodland economy. A score of oaks were down, the flayed trunks thrown pell-mell among the trampled anemones, the lopped spray, which was already in yellow leaf, withering in shattered confusion all about. Some of the fallen were but timber—trees of the crowd, mere sixty-foot masts, with a head of boughs at the top fighting for light and air; but there were two or three on the edge of the wood with characters of their own, that had been a sort of landmarks in my walks, the pattern of whose ivy-trails and the grey wrinklings of whose boles had printed themselves on my memory in a thousand conjunctions of varying mood and weather. Worst of all, just beyond the wood, there was a sudden gap that struck the mind with something of the rebellious grief proper to graver losses. The noble tree which crowned the knoll beyond the wood, spreading his boughs twenty yards into the cornfield on the one side, and thrusting back the thicket as far behind him, the honoured friend whose stately strength I have stood to look at summer and winter—the mighty muscle of the bared limbs or the dome of massy leafage whose outline the perfect prime of age had brought to the full semicircle—lies shattered and dinted into the clay among the springing wheat. Every time I went by him I used to make an inward salutation to his absolute fulfilment of the function of a tree, with a back-handed reference, perhaps, to some

prevalent standards of human completeness. As we stood by the great sawn butt, as high as a man's shoulder, the Warden counted the rings of the grain—two hundred and eighty, if the axe had not robbed him of some years at the edge—and made a rough calculation of the feet of timber in the trunk. I found myself wondering what I would give, over and above the price he will fetch in the woodyard, to have him up and green once more, and saying that it would be a long time before I care to take my walk through Horse Wood again.

As it happened, I found myself there only a night or two afterwards, and sat for half an hour on a bough of the fallen giant, with a score of his fellows glimmering about me in the dusk on the flower-strewn slope, and the clean raw smell of the oak sap filling all the air. I had nodded and roused myself once or twice, when all at once I saw the souls of the trees, the Dryads, gathered together in a company, coming down the woodmen's path, sighing as they came with a thin echo of their old tree-top music and pacing slowly amongst their shattered boughs. They were shepherded by Hermes, who bore a felling-axe in place of his wand. At the brow where the path drops steeply to the sallow-grown bottoms of the wood, they met with Pan, who seemed to complain of the wrong done to his realm and the exile of his people. "That I have charge to bring

them over Styx is true," I heard Hermes say; "but shall there not be oaks in the under-world, and souls to inhabit them sufficient for the woodlands of the blest? Doth not Jove take thus at their season the tree, and the hyacinths beneath it, and the grass, so that there may be no lack of shade there, nor of soft lying, nor of garlands for those who rest? These, and many another sort of good things beside I convey from men's sight into the darkness; or how should they, when they have been ferried over, find all that the poets told them should be there? And so, fair son, let me on with my flock."

With that he passed on, and when I rubbed my eyes and looked after them, there was nothing there but a wreath of mist rising from the hidden turns of the brook, and no sound but the cry of the plover from the fallow beyond the wood. I left the lopped trunk and the litter of withering leaves, pleasing myself with the fancy that somewhere the soul of the tree was budding freshly, and the well-remembered shadow was falling across the wood-violets and anemones in the light of a fairer sky.

XII

June 24.

When I called at Burntoak Farm last week for a talk with Mrs. Ventom, I found her making tea for Lady Anne in the kitchen. Such a conjunction of feminine capability is a memorable thing, if a little arduous, for the chance-comer to the feast. It is rather as if an honest Bœotian, going to pay a call at the Delphic shrine, had found the Sibyl entertaining her colleague of Cumæ. Both the ladies are most serenely and practicably wise in their several ways, and I always maintain that Lady Anne might, with great profit to her neighbours, take over the whole law-business of this circuit, while Mrs. Ventom's judgment should certainly supersede the present form and matter of our County Council. But, like some exceptional voices, their gifts seem formed to mix their high and low together in concert: they inspire each other when they confer. If they would but put their heads together about their country's government, I protest that a week's specimen of their management would be enough to sweep away the tangle of impersonal enactment and

impossible persons, and to upset the whole concatenation, from the calamitous Tom Gates with his tipsy vote, up to the public-spirited gentlemen who form the summit of the dear device. But what hope is there of any such devolution, when the inspiration of the Sibyls springs entirely from the religion of minding the business that lies next at hand?

Mrs. Ventom has not learned to concede the modern whimsy of meals out-of-doors. A garden is very well at proper times, she holds; but it was not made to eat in; and if she abhors one manner of eating, it is what she calls "tea in her lap." I found the great kitchen, with its black oak ceiling and stone floor, pleasantly cool and dark after the glaring dust of Plash Lane in its summer guise. The table, with its historic damask got-up as Mrs. Ventom knows how, with its ample provision—the butter, the cream, the honey, the jams, the cakes, all answering her inexorable standard of home-made perfection—was a lesson in forgotten arts. Both door and windows stood wide, and through them we looked out on the sunlit greenery of the garden. Mrs. Ventom, as becomes the mistress of three hundred acres, and a power in the parish, is rather contemptuous towards the house-piece, the twenty rods or so allotted to such mere luxuries as gooseberries or shallots; none the less, the green-stuff flourishes beyond the ordinary, and the flowers—seemingly chance-set among the worts

in the old way, a vast lavender bush, a rose hollyhock, a tuft of white pinks—fit into their places and come into the picture in a fashion missed by some more painful gardeners' designs. Such graces as these are kept in their places by sound utilities; a midsummer hatch of white Dorkings scratches about the pinks, and the flagged path between the box borders and the lavender is lined with rows of cream-pans, glittering dazzlingly in the afternoon sun.

My arrival only suspended for a minute or two a discussion of intimate domestic affairs, as lively and actual as only a couple of really strong-headed women can make it; and while I heard the counts of the indictment against Hetty Dawes the kitchen-maid, I compared, as I have done at other times, the looks and ways of the two wise women, the bailiff's widow and the earl's daughter, so curiously alike through their differences, and thought what an education the pair might afford to some simple propounders of equality, in the science, hardly yet conceived of, of levelling or fitting in. The perfect understanding of positions and absolute ease in them, the immunities of half a life's friendship, the fine intuitions by which the lesser lady derogated and the greater assumed, might have taught a new category of ideas to all that painful world which for ever scrambles and kicks to keep its own head at the heaven-appointed altitude in the scale of creation. In the matter of looks, the

mistress of the farm, no doubt, carries it easily at first sight. She is one of those rare people whose dressing seems an inevitable part of themselves, and no mere appendage, as pleasantly characteristic as the wholesome complexion or the springy gait; whether one view her in her dairying print and apron, or in her church-going black silk, one pronounces that nothing more is wanted, that the alert, well-turned figure, the fine hands—proof, it seems, against the rasp of house-work—the smooth brown hair, the clear colour in the spare, rather high-boned cheeks, could not possibly look better in any sort of tire but the one that is on. Whereas Lady Anne's old black mushroom hat, her quaint home-made jacket, with its business-like pockets, the darned gloves of her country walks are an effectual disguise. She has grown stouter of late years, and her face, seen in side-view, with half-drooped eyelid and sunken chin, sometimes looks a little heavy and inert: her white hair is apt, in the ordinary course, to stray rather disorderly. But one has only to listen to her voice, to get a look from the light blue eyes, a look for the most part one of serene appraisement, but sometimes lit with an imperious fire, in order to understand all that is told of the place she held in London before she lost her son and withdrew from the world at thirty. There is, I think, some bond between her and Mrs. Ventom, which had its beginning in that time; they were together, I

imagine, when the catastrophe happened, nearly forty years ago, and out of the trouble grew one of those understandings which are the closer and more lasting for their being rarely or never expressed in words.

The delinquency of Hetty Dawes was the main strand of the talk on this occasion. There was, indeed, a somewhat perfunctory attempt to bring in on my behalf the weather and the prospects of the gooseberry crop, but I have managed to acquire with my acquaintance the character of a general philosopher, who can see his own affair in the greater part of other people's subjects; and presently, without much apology, we came round to the little kitchen-maid again. To outward view Hetty is almost pretty, according to our not very exacting standard, with the casual prettiness of colour and ways of looking and smiling, which just carries off the slack-knit frame and blunted features of the race. As to her ghostly part, she is just one more of those heartbreaking little nonentities which we breed in such multitudinous uniformity. She seems to have nothing about her so positive as either vices or virtues, her mistress says; it is doubtful whether she has any innate motions at all, except perhaps an instinctive power of dodging work and a propensity, leisurely, but one that arrives, towards amusement gratis. Three years' drill at Burntoak having made her really useful

at due range of tether, she gives notice, not altogether unexpectedly. No, she has nothing to complain of; she doesn't want to be recommended to any one, thank you; she has heard of a place in Bayswater, and has written to the lady. And she had only turned her hair up a month before! They always go like that then: there must be actually something in the operation which affects the brain, Mrs. Ventom thinks, meditating the drift of a long and strenuous experience of scullery-maids.

"It wasn't always so, Lucy," says Lady Anne. "You'll remember Jane Burtenshaw——"

"Yes, and Polly Knight," replies the widow; "they were made differently, somehow, then. Jenny couldn't read a line, and Polly could but write her name. It's education that does it, my lady."

"Oh, Lucy!" cries Lady Anne, with a grave shake of the head, rallying to the conventions in countercheck to Mrs. Ventom's more sweeping iconoclasm.

"Well, what they *call* education, my lady. If the schooling they get was made or meant for country-folk, it would be another thing. You'll remember the inspector last year, who wanted us to plant roses on the north side of the schoolhouse, and made all the children laugh with his question about swedes. And there's poor Dempster who went out naturalising and caught a cockchafer, and wanted to argue against the whole school that

it was something else. It's Londoners teaching the children to be Londoners all through; and then they wonder why they want to leave the country and go into the towns."

"But there's been a good deal of improvement lately," says Lady Anne, still showing a gravity which I suspect as slightly beyond the needs of the case; "they have actually been talking about teaching field-work and house-work."

"And who's to do the teaching?" asks Mrs. Ventom, smiling at some vision, perhaps, of certain top-hatted visitors she knows, over their boots in her ten-acre in January. "They don't even know the outside of their own business yet, with all their talk about the science of teaching; pouring stuff out of a spout is all they can think of. . . . If they'd ever had to fatten ducks, now," she goes on meditatively, "they'd have learnt that there's some hold more than others. But it's all straight out of the books. They don't seem to reckon," concludes Mrs. Ventom, with an analogy after her wont, "that you can put a fire out with coal."

"But about Hetty," Lady Anne began again, going back to an old prejudice of hers; "we might have found her a good place somewhere in the country, Lucy. You say she has never been out of Sheringham yet; she's a mere child, and London's a terrible place. Surely, if you'd used a little authority——"

Mrs. Ventom shook her head. "People must

learn," was all she would say; "learn and find out for themselves."

Just then Hetty herself came into sight, busy about the milk-pans along the box hedge, and both the judges turned to look at her, out in the clear light of the garden, and I looked at the judges. The two faces offered a curious contrast of expression. Lady Anne's was solicitous and very tender, as she watched the little busy head with its new-learned vanity of flaxen top-knot; Mrs. Ventom's meaning, as she repeated her formula, "They've got to learn, my lady," was not so easy to interpret; but I thought that I saw underneath the hardness a deeper care even than Lady Anne's, the tenderness which has learned not to fight against the strangeness of the ways of life, knows something of the cost it cannot pay, the things that must be let alone for ever.

The unconscious culprit finished her tidying up by the box hedge, and the court went back to the consideration of causes again. None of us—our memories being of about the same span, and, I think, agreeing to a considerable extent in a selective turn—had any need to go beyond the obvious *post hoc* of the schools. Once more Mrs. Ventom fixes, with her own homely illustrations, on the nerveless, slack-sinewed methods of the educational hierarchy, the want of mother-wit and grasp of the rude elements of life. They have shut themselves up in a dead world of their

own till, in matters of plain sense, they are stupider than the dullest child they set up to teach. "I've never come across a master yet," she says, "nor an inspector either, for that matter, who remembered that what you put first into a box when you're packing it, comes out last. But it makes a difference, when you want to get at the things. Not that there's anything in most of them, when you do get them open."

And with that she began to tie her bonnet strings—the signal of dismissal—and made ready to see Lady Anne back to the highroad. I took my way home round by Nyman's Corner, and chancing on the outrush of the children coming out of school, had opportunity to observe the prevalence of pale faces and dull looks and undeveloped frames—a strange alteration, within my recollection, from the sun-bleached heads, the walnut complexions, the stout little anatomies, checked by the very abundance of exercise in light and air, but prompt to shoot up and broaden at the due season, which were to be seen before we had learned to imprison the forming-age for the best part of the day within stuffy walls, at best nurseries of dirt and sickness, sometimes—as Nyman's Corner taught us but last summer—deadly with bungled drains. We were never, I judge, at any time a particularly well-favoured race hereabouts; yet the red cheeks and clear eyes to be seen among the outliers of the

farms, if not in the purlieus of the village, used to carry it off pretty well. Nowadays the mis-featured faces and shapeless heads get no help from the blessed sun and wind; our skins are bleached, our legs are atrophied, our chests contracted, in order that our souls may take the likeness—just heavens!—the likeness of the soul of Dempster and his kind.

As I shook off the little crowd, and got out of range of their cheerful noise—and alack! of their appeal to another sense—I overtook the Warden, and walked with him as far as the head of the street, propounding some of the doubts which I had been entertaining, and finding him, in his positive, unhesitating way, full of the same subject. That aura which I had passed through had evidently reached his nose; there was at least one uniform product of the system always to be had: for the manufacture of froust trust the elementary schools! Some day it would, of course, strike people that education might include learning to wash. I got the Warden to give me the text of a place in Xenophon that was in my head, about the occupations which compel people *καθῆσθαι καὶ σκιατραφεῖσθαι*, to sit indoors and live out of the sun; and he reminded me of some more sound remarks in the passage, how that people reared under those conditions are not much use to their friends, and make poor defenders of their country. "And we shan't mend that," says the Warden,

"by having a drill-sergeant for them once a week. Oh, the imbecile wiseacres of authorities, who just begin to have a glimmering that the body counts for something, and talk about school-dinners! We shall have to get back to Plato, and make Asklepios a politician, before we can give the poor little wretches a chance."

I quoted some of Mrs. Ventom's dicta about the *personnel* of the system. "Ay," says the Warden, "the head that woman has! They've got the wrong men everywhere. Take the committee; think of our good Sims-Bigg, and Billy Hicks the educationalist! And then all those bloodsuckers in the departments—don't you know the type?—sweating Firsts in History like Chepmell and Blagden and Poppleton—with their annual increase and pensions, and their seventy-pound houses at Bromley or Muswell Hill—damned souls from the day they began to spell. One might get over them, though, or put up with them; it's the Heads and the Parliament men that make one absolutely hopeless: they *must* know better, one thinks. Old Herder—he comes to see me generally when he's over from Bonn—insists it's simply a plan of the powerful to Helotise the lower orders for their own ends; and, on my word, it looks uncommonly like it. Of course the Radicals would be sentimental fools enough to play into the hands of the conspirators, thinking we're going to have the Millennium that way. The fool or rogue dilemma comes

in somehow. People like our Billy, and even like Chepmell, perhaps really believe in themselves. There's some hope of a man like Chepmell, who is suddenly illuminated after twenty years in the office, and discovers that it is a life and death matter to interest the children in the land. Not the slightest distrust of themselves for having been wrong for half a lifetime ; they start gaily on the new tack, more convinced of their infallibility than ever. But the politicians !—well, you know where I think their illumination comes from : 'darkness visible,' eh ?"

To all this I nodded my head and agreed, as I hope a wise man may, feeling the satisfaction of hearing some one else go further than one's own proprieties would quite concede, and getting, like Panurge with his page, one's cursing done by proxy. When I bade the Warden good night at the Almshouse gate, we were agreed that there could be no beginning of real elementary education in the country till the whole of the present ghastly simulacrum was swept out of the way, and the hands of Billy Hicks and Dempster and Chepmell put to some less momentous business than shaping the destiny of the race. As I climbed the hill homewards I mused what sort of account little Hetty Dawes would present against those busy traffickers, in the great final clearing-house of debts and credits, whose existence is one of the most consolatory of my private and supplementary tenets,

I was at Burntoak again yesterday afternoon, and found that Hetty's term was up, and that she was to leave by the next morning's carrier. On my way through the village I had met Mrs. Sims-Bigg, home for a few days from the whirl of the season in town. There was no resisting or escaping her; town was such a change; everybody wanted a change; *I* wanted a change, most decidedly: the country was all right in August, and for a Sunday—now and then; but really to appreciate it, one must be back in Kensington again. I must come up and rub the rust off a bit; a year in the country made people positively mouldy. Under this sort of education I scuffled along deprecatingly, as I have seen a small boy reluctant, ear-led by domestic law; and only when the irresistible lady had gone, shrieking to me through the noise of her carriage-wheels the address of some Brompton lodgings, which I was to engage at once, did I think of all the neat remarks with which I should have defied her. I carried on something of these reflections while I sat in Mrs. Ventom's kitchen, and watched Hetty Dawes rinse her cream-pans for the last time at Burntoak. I thought of the gasping nights and the garish mornings when nose and eyes take the whirling dust and manure at the gusty corners, of the burden of the omnibuses going by from light to dark at the next turning, of the horizon of chimney-pots and sooty spires: of all this matched

against the hourly alteration of beauty which will grow in these solitudes between this and Goodwood. Who shall blame Hetty for her venture into the unknown glories of Bayswater, if our accomplished and informed Mrs. Sims-Bigg, an instance of nice balance between intellect and propriety, wilfully prefers Cromwell Road in May to her own bluebell woods, the nightly crush to the breathings of the dusk across the Sussex lawns?

Hetty has finished her day's labours in good time: she has packed her box in a flutter of awful joy, I conjecture, at the Paradise in view; but as I sit by the open door of the kitchen in the first of the twilight, I see her go down the garden, and gather a bunch of flowers to take with her to-morrow, something of the country to have near her when there will be no more mossy paths to walk in between the daisy edging and the tall striped tulips, in the air heavy with the smell of the Brompton stocks and the syringa. Ah, Hetty, the change is swift! Before the country posy shall have altogether faded in your little attic among the chimney-pots, a spell will begin to work; soon after the dust-cart has received its relics, the country will be dying out of your heart, never to return, or perhaps, perhaps to return only as the saddest of ghosts, which you would give the world to forget. Before the plane trees in your square shall have cast their sooty skins again you shall be

Cockney from the sole of your shoes to the top-most curl of your tousled locks ; but never shall your small spirit, that leaves these meadows, God knows, country-clean, cast off the smutch of the smoke once taken. You will not turn back, out of all the thousands that have gone that road. You will forget the fields, the silent hillsides, the vast calm of evening upon the garden where the stocks and the syringa grew.

XIII

June 28.

If there are days when an idle man feels convincingly the reproach of his empty hands, and knows that he is left in a backward eddy while the main stream of the world's business goes by, there are others which lull him with the notion of a vaster process, the set of a master-current sweeping alike intents and achievements, the active and the folded hands towards the unguessed deeps. The passive sentiment is naturally stronger as middle age draws towards the outer mark; as youth recedes and our trace lengthens behind us, we think it easier to produce the line of motion, and to make some guess at points to be passed through in the shorter tract that remains. For this reason, among others, the past becomes a thing of more and more consequence to our scheme of things as the years shorten. In my own case, the hours which seem to justify the otiose attitude are, for the most part, touched with an indolent melancholy of remembrance and an anticipatory emotion, a sort of proleptic pathos only relevant if the line of

motion already described may be understood as producible beyond a given point.

The motions of the mind respond, I believe, more readily to the influence of hours and weather and seasons of the year than we generally conceive. The days when I bask wholly conscience-clean in the tide of pensive idleness are the first two or three of summer warmth, vivid and pure after rain, with their stores of sweet air and moisture untouched. After a cloudless week in June, the earth is sunburned and staled, the sky smirched with grey haze and close airs. When dry heat increases day by day, when leaves wilt and cattle lie close in the shade, and the landscape seems to endure, waiting for the truce of the dusk ; then the delicate spell is gone, time seems to drive on furiously, and there is no place for dreams of august rhythms which gather one's own dilatory paces into their scheme. During those serene days of early summer, I find in the light which glitters or sleeps soft, in the stir or pause of leaves, even in the coming and going of moist earthy smells from flag-grown edges of the pond, an intention, an expressive spirit connected with all the old June days of this fashion which I can remember. In my sessions under the beech-tree shade, my mind retraces with a curious sagacity past hours of the like light and weather, and presents in an astonishingly vivid and actual setting the very motion of thoughts which came some sunny noon twenty or

thirty years ago. There seems to be no discoverable method or sequence in the phantasmagoria; it may be that some hint from a drowsing sense, a precise degree of contrast between grey-green foliage and grey-blue sky, or that insistent smell from the pond-flags stirs some particular store of memory; but in general there is no traceable reason in mechanics for the selection of scenes. Why, to-day, should I see a line of tall, ragged poplars, a composition whose awkward regularity still vaguely irks the mind, beyond a broad reach of shining river, with an eyot white with meadow-sweet, and a boat drifting between the sedge-beds of a side channel with lazily dipping oars, its varnish flashing to the sun, the red parasol in the stern an outrageous spot of colour on the low greens of the river valley? I recall my solemn scorn of that irresponsible ark, as I recall my envy of the mowers swinging in line through the bronze green of the meadows beyond the stream. Is it the smell of the hay now making in the field below the garden which brings for the next vision a meadow where I did work, both with scythe and fork, and yet did not find any considerable peace of mind? I see again, clearer than the impressions of yesterday, the expanse of gold-green under the overflowing sunlight, ridged with the grey windrows, shut in by a line of dark elms, and against their darkness the rose of a girl's face, half the field away, watched with jealous devotion,

with a boy's desperate caring that was torn by every word and look of hers to the workers round her. I remember the wind which took the hay from the prong as it was shaken out, and stirred the elms all the morning, murmuring a language which it seemed one ought to understand; the lilac-grey of the eastern sky beyond the elms; the harsh honey of the elder hanging along the hedge, at once luscious and austere, the smell which every summer mingles with the hay to make the strongest of all the spells which conjure through the outward senses. That gust must have gone by when I found myself at last close to the vision of the wild-rose face, the arms raised to put back the blown hair from the forehead, the smile which lit deep in her eyes before it began to crease the cheek and lift the corners of the mouth.

Of these recoveries of the past, the most vivid have for their scene my first playgrounds of Sandwell stream and Allington hills. Some fifteen years from my first recollection of those coasts had worked a heavy change upon the face of the country; the lavender-fields still gave way to ghastly quarters of mean building; one by one the familiar woods or meadows showed the fatal notice-board; a new nation swarmed in upon the barely finished streets and staked-out estates. I had always a way of making up eclectic backgrounds for my imaginations, and for a time those Surrey hills and

streams, with their relics of fast-vanishing pastoral beauty, served me well enough as scenery for my experiments in letters and arts. For two or three years I lived in a make-believe world of my own, materialised in copy-book epics and countless drawings done out of one's own head, with a terrible waste of fancy; a world that was mediæval and Gothic, as many another lad's must have been then, shaped under a medley of influences,—Pre-Raphaelite pictures and the later cycle of Arthurian legend. Such things as the designs for the Tennyson "Poems," by Rossetti and Millais, or a Joan of Arc by Du Maurier, in the "Cornhill," stirred an enthusiasm which even yet prevents the full judgment due to all modern antiques. After a time my imaginative works in laborious pen-and-ink were considered worthy of the discipline of drawing from the cast and the draped model. Studies in a life class in a dim and dusty little cockpit off Newman Street, and more academic lessons in the echoing emptiness of a national workshop, served to show that the stuff I had would not stand the shaping; and spite of the complementary testimonials of two of my guides, who told me severally that "I could draw, but had no surface," and that "I had ideas, but couldn't draw," I abandoned the labours of the Conté crayon and the bread pellet, and went back to Dr. Ransome. The time was not all lost; at the Museum I learned at least the inexorable standard

of the Theseus and the metopes; an ivory, or fourteenth-century window-glass at Kensington was matter for a week's imaginings. On my homeward journey day by day I could idealise the Green Park into lawns of Camelot, almost as easily as in early morning walks I made the groves of Nonsuch or the high-hedged fields by Morden the scenery of visions—crowded epic and vivid fresco colour—of the happy prime. Those were the days of my service to Lystrenore, Princess of the land of Arvall, after the last long thoughts of Barbara des Vœux had died, and before those hay-time visions of Letty Ransome had found their power. They were not altogether unwholesome; for, after all, spite of drawings done out of one's head, and wastes of blank verse, one was learning certain aspects of the world at a much greater rate than one was putting off one's fancies upon it. Yet the suburban-Arthurian world presently needed a fresher air, which first blew in a very timely manner from Cumberland dales. The change from our cooped country to the horizons of waste moor or jagged peaks, the fell purple-dark under the streaming cloud, the yew-hung steeps beneath the crag wall shimmering grey and vaporous in the heat, was one summer's piece of education; and if I at once forsook the Idylls for the Excursion, the conversion was healthy at least in this, that it led to no derivative essays; there was an end to any sort

of imitative production, pictorial or epic, once for all.

By a subtle and particular revenge of time, my daylight visions of the past have more and more to do with Oxford as the years go by. This morning the Warden shows me a letter from Molly Crofts, full of the doings of Commem, and "the most brilliant Encænia ever known;" and presently I am away in the dead ends of Summer Term thirty years ago, and find myself high up in the gallery of the Sheldonian, close to one of the upper windows, looking out on the steep perspective of the street, over whose cobblestones winds from Balliol an absurd little foreshortened procession in scarlet and black. Over against me one of the statues of the Clarendon Building blocks the view, its joints and iron cramps and hollow shadows keenly clear on the white stone which glares dazzlingly against the opaque violet-blue of the sky. Across the street is a front of mouldered gables and mullions, and the confused chimneys and roofs of the town; and then, asleep in the cloudless noon, the swell of blue hills, hills without a name, with no landmark of Botley poplars or Cumnor clump, a mere glimpse of happy places in country silence and ease, a prophecy of the untravelled world awaiting the feet delivered from bondage. For at that time the reverend walls were a prison-house; I observed bounds and ordinances with impatient exactitude,

and kept the rulers at immitigable distance. I had fallen into an interregnum between two minds, a restless humour of discontent which fretted at an imagination of time running to waste in sterile humanities, and made me envy those brown-faced mowers swinging through the meadows along the tow-path. The attitude was perhaps partly due to chances of upbringing, but not altogether. There was something fundamental in my careful solitude. I turned out not long since an old Conington's Æneid of those days, with a motto I had written on the fly-leaf—*Solus incedo*—and through all the mewling coxcombry of it, I have to acknowledge a touch of fate. There are cases in which one recognises with mixed feelings that one was right at twenty, after all.

So on that summer morning I turned from the procession that drew towards the Twelve Cæsars, with a defiance light-hearted at the thought of the last year of servitude already running out, and lifted my eyes to the sleeping hills and all that lay beyond.

And even at the moment I think the spirit of the place began its counter-stroke, put forth a hint of the power it held, a hardly felt touch of the pang that was to come when all the blue hills were travelled and despoiled, and we return to look among the old walls for the grace which we held so lightly, and yet was perhaps the best thing we were to know.

In all these reconstitutions of mine—of shining hayfields, of narrow streets in the sun, black-shadowed under archways and crumbling porticoes, of a slow-spinning eddy in the green water of a summer flood, that comes round the edge of a reed-bed, and parts the flags to show the dreaming spires—what defence is to be made against the censure of those who shake solemn heads at such necromancy, charge me with playing with shadows while the solid hour demands my energies? Nothing to their purpose, I am afraid; perhaps I should do best to refuse to plead, or to counter-charge—as may be done with no great pains and a good deal of effect—with a reflection on the qualities of those belauded activities. When once the Warden took me up upon the matter of my too pictorial or scenic idiosyncrasy of thinking, I read him one or two places in Berkeley's Alciphron, where the objects of sight are offered as arbitrary signs, "by whose sensible intervention the Author of Nature constantly explaineth himself to the eyes of men:" and suggested that he and a good many others might on their part be giving a quite insufficient attention to the language those signs should express, and might be missing intimations which mere loiterers like myself, following their bent of note-taking, or even mere vacant reception, happened to light upon. I would not exchange for fifty of the Warden's Compensation Theories the instinct which at

seeming random marked hours and places on the way, and brings back the old Junes to outshine the blue depths seen here beyond the beech-tree shade, so persistently and exactly that at times I am led to guess at some relation and meaning beneath the careless-seeming choice.

XIV

July 3.

My own hay grass being reduced to a minute acreage—almost a matter for the swap-hook and wheelbarrow—I am obliged to take my seasonable pleasure in observing other men's fields. My neighbour at the Folly Farm handles his forty acres in the wholesale modern way; but that still leaves us the smell of the fresh-cut swathe and the rising stack, and—with a little shutting of the eyes—some of the early associations of haytime. The mowing-machine, having finished in due course the cutting of the smaller fields, the Alder-Legs, Ox Pasture, and Tanner's Mead, jolts and lurches into the Twelve Acre, the last and largest piece of grass on the farm, meaning to lay in swathe by nightfall, if no mishap betide, as much as once on a time would have cost two good scythemen the better part of a week. If anything is to hinder, it will be some fault in the machine's anatomy, a split pin jarred out, or a screw stripped; there is nothing in the weather, or in the "manners" of the grass (as we say) to offer any delay. The meadow shows the green-bronze of just-ripe

herbage, the fine broken colour made by the red-browns and greys of the seed-heads powdered over the lush green bottom. The long slope is bright with buttercup, Ragged-Robin, and rusty sorrel—gayer to the eye than to the moralising mind—and rolls in ceaseless waves like a sea under the south-west breeze, breaking into foam along the shore where the swaying ox-eyes and hemlock line the hedge. The clouds are "high" enough and "hard" enough to satisfy the country prognostic of set-fair weather; the sun rarely breaks through their serried lines or the vault of fine-spun vapour under which they sail, but fills the whole sky with a diffused fire, too broad and bright for the eyes without the shading hand, and pours an almost shadowless daylight on the fields.

When I went into the meadow on my round of the fields this morning, the mowing-machine, gay from the works in blue and scarlet paint, the gold-leaf still fresh on the lettering of its patents and prize medals, was receiving the last touches with the oiler and cotton-waste due to the new toy. The driver gets up on the seat, the horses answer the jerk of the reins and the "Git *bahk!*" with a sedate half-turn, and the rattling engine plunges into the grass. But before it can cut its first lane down the slope, the way has been prepared for it by an older tool. Just as the machine got under weigh, old Abram Branch, who has cleared a width for the horses all round the hedge-sides with

the scythe, came up to the corner where I was standing, and stood to watch his successor at work. Small and bent and brown, hardly a day older in all the years the parish has known him, every haytime he appears from somewhere "along up'ards"—he rarely owns a more precise domicile than that—with his kettle and a few belongings in a sack over one shoulder, and his treasured scythe, its edge carefully guarded by its grooved and warped hazel-rod, over the other, and resumes his ancient trade. The glory of the scythe departed, the skilled mower ceased hereabouts some twenty years ago; the great days of Herculean work and commensurate beer are over. But there is still a remnant left; the old craft still holds, and will perhaps continue to hold the lower place to which it so quickly fell. There is always the strip to be cleared for the machine's first sally; there are rough and uneven pieces where the rigid cutter cannot go, to call for the more adaptable tool. Old Branch, after he has mowed the avenue round the twelve-acre, has the next field all to himself, a narrow strip between two shaws, whose humpy brows and wet hollows would capsize the machine if it ventured upon them. "They got to come to me, ye see," says Abram, as he knocks out his pipe, and sets about sharpening his blade for the thistles and rushes, looking a little wistfully, perhaps, at the even depth of the grass with its thick moist bottom, which is not for him. He

watches the machine as it comes whirring down the field, and as he moves off towards his own province repeats with a jerk of the head towards the supplanter: "Pieces where he can't go, they wants the scythe to 'em; and then, ye see, they got to come to *me*."

I preferred to follow the craftsman to his waste corner and watch the historic rather than the present mode. There will be time and to spare this next thirty years to observe the development of mechanism ever reducing the human element in labour to lower terms; the motor-mower and the electric elevator will presently demand attention in ways not to be ignored; but the chance of watching the survival of a vanishing art, the height of an accumulated tradition of skill, that may die without an heir to-morrow, is by all arguments of good economy a thing to be taken when it comes. I perched myself on the heave-gate between the two fields; and there, under the crest of the slope and away to the windward, the restless burr of the link and pinion scarcely reached me; what I heard was the "sound to rout the brood of cares," the crisp rustle and swish of the steel, an even pulse of sound, after Nature's own pattern both in rhythm and tone, in tune with the voices of winds and waters; and yet, with its pause and ictus, a thing of art in its own way as complete and elaborate as a hexameter. For the eye's pleasure there is the balanced turn and sway of the body, the shifting of

the light on the muscles of the sunburnt arms, the easy grace of the man's knack, almost without effort, it seems to the onlooker here at the barway under the dog-rose hedge. But the grass is rank and wiry, and every time that the swathe is finished at the hedgeside, and sometimes before it is half done, the scythe must be sharpened. There is a trick in the handling of the rubber which is not to be picked up in a day; and the choice of the stone, the matching of its grain and hardness with the temper of the steel is a gift of experience. Old Abram touches up his blade delicately, as if he loved it. Its edge is worn down in a wavy line to within an inch or so of the rib at the back; it is a very old blade, he says; you can't get new metal like that now. The handle of the scythe, worm-eaten as all old hazel is apt to be, and visibly "tender" at the head, is also a survival from more painstaking days, its curves and angles full and ample; the new shafts which hang outside the country ironmongers' doors when haytime comes round approach more and more to the slovenly simplicity of the straight line. Knowledge such as this, and some understanding of the varied "hang" of the blade and its angle with the shaft, according to the user's idiosyncrasy and the kind of work it is meant to do, the several qualities of rivetted and cast backs, the way to measure off the places for the two "doles" or grips on the sneath, any one might learn from Abram as he rests a

minute between sharping-up and starting again on the new swathe. But to know the beauty of the tool one must learn to handle it, to master the way in which the stroke runs, circling in the curve of the blade, but dragged a little inwards at the finish; one must acquire the instinctive knack of hitting off the distance between the edge and the ground, according to the quality and state of the grass, and the way to make the point and the heel both do their proper work in the stroke. There is a degree in even an amateur's skill when the standing grass, rustling above its dew-drenched bottom, calls to the mower much as the south-west ripple across the stream calls to the fly-fisher, and when the habit and mastery of the scythe are a pleasure certainly comparable to that in the control of the rod. There are not wanting mishaps to help out the parallel; the hidden mole-hill to bury the point of the blade in, the bit of stone in the grass which tinkles along the steel and takes off all the edge at a stroke are comparable to the alder-twig, the knot on the flowering rush which wait for the angler's backward cast. It is the simplicity of the scythe, the product, perfected and fixed, of the early wisdom of the world, and its adaptableness to varying conditions, that make it an artist's instrument. "He," says old Branch, nodding towards the engine droning beyond the hedge, "he's terrified by they emmet-heaps; and if he comes to a stump or a dick, he's done. Why,

us mowers, we can cut right round a partridge-nest, and never set her off." This, maybe, is a flourish, fellow to the classic ploughman's boast that he could draw his furrow straight enough to put out a worm's eye; but it contains a truth.

The next time that Abram mowed up to the hedge, I put my coat on the gate, and took the scythe from him for a turn across the field. I found that the old knack, untried for a good many years, still served me tolerably, and with Abram watching me from the hedge, a little solicitous, perhaps, for his favourite in alien hands, I made fair practice, only once slicing the sod and leaving two or three ragged-bitten tufts behind me. But before I was halfway across the field, the unused muscles were calling for caution, and after a few more strokes, in a posture sufficiently upright to have satisfied even Cobbett's requirements, when he saw the old man mowing short grass at East Everley, I handed the tool back to its owner, and watched him go swinging, taking a swathe a foot wider than mine, tirelessly across the field. I went back to the gate again and put on my coat, thinking of several ways in which a training like Abram's, with its resultant amazingly tough fibre at seventy odd, might be serviceable to the country, a training for which half-hours of slouching drill in the school yard, or even fortnight volunteer camps are not a complete substitute. And once more I conjectured how long a scientific age will continue to think it

can obtain its ideals without paying Fate a penny for the accommodation.

The next time that Abram stopped to sharp-up, he accompanied the clink of his whetstone with more criticism of the machine, which had been silent for some time, save for sounds of hammering and a forcible discussion between the driver and the man who had been sharpening the spare cutter by the upper gate. "I call this *work*," says Abram; "makes a man o' ye, I reckon. But sittin' all day like that chap over there, all of a heap, on a seat that pretty nigh shakes the innards out o' ye, and just sayin' 'Come up!' and 'Git back'——"

The aposiopesis is eloquent; he slips back the rubber into its sling, and bends to his swathe again. What ought I to say to him, oh hierarchs of progress, the next time that he works his way to the hedge, wipes the sweat out of his eyes, and stands a minute to take the stiffness out of his back? Shall I reprove his barbarous economics, vindicate to him the gifts of science and the march of mind, tell him that the old threat of ἥμενος ἀμήσεις is blessedly fulfilled in that jolted figure perched on the racketing machine? Or shall I leave him in solitary enjoyment of his theory that every tool has two ends, one working on the matter, the other on the man? I think I will be indulgent to the myth which his faith implies, that somewhere in the tract between the helpless first

childhood of the world and its old age, a race of grown men, capable of all heights and depths of human grace and strength, understanding by heaven-sent vision precisely how far labour may be saved without losing the labourer, forged the crooked scythe the old man wields so well.

XV

July 5.

FULL summer, with keen sunlight and furnace-air and grey-blue sky, has come all at once, without prelude, as it seems to do in all these later years; and I am back again in the long mornings in my old place under the cool dark of the beech tree, reading the old books over, smelling the grass and mould as they reek to the sun, and looking off now and again to watch the swifts whirl across the sky, the sheep in the meadow shift and pack themselves into the shadow as it narrows along the elm-hung hedge, or the clouds draw overhead, burning and wasting as they go, through the dazzling loop-holes of the leaves. Yesterday there were signs of thunder working up out of the south-east, the watching of whose growth became more of the morning's work than my book. From the first beginnings which I can remember, my temper has always answered with an instinctive restlessness to the tense atmosphere of brewing storm; but though the old anxiety does not seem to lose much of its effect under lapse of time, I am able to find a sort of repose in the vast unity of purpose, the

tremendous strategy of the gathered power. I had been reading Lucretius, and when the first low roll of thunder settled any doubt there might be as to the meaning of the grey sheeted vapour barred with lean black streaks, I turned to those theories of storms in the sixth book. To us who know such a vast deal better, all those contrivances of clouds butting against each other or shouldering sidelong, and of the explosive winds pent within them, seem sad stuff indeed ; and one takes refuge in the poetry of the descriptions. To my fancy, all Lucretius' science seems curiously offhand and accidental ; it looks as if he had sat down, gnawed his stylus, and evolved there and then the laboured explanations which he had never thought of before, or, where he copies Epicurus, had chosen haphazard among his master's light-hearted alternatives. The Warden, I believe, once contemplated a selection, which would leave out the whole of Memmius' Mangnall, as he called it, and take only the inspired places. In the descriptive passages there are, besides the general beauty of form and colour, here and there fine particularities of detail, which in Latin verse always, I think, strike us as a little surprising. Their unexpectedness may be partly due to schoolboy reminiscences of the ground-out quantum of nonsense lines (was there ever a greater literary crime than giving Virgil to the average fourth-form boy ?) ; but in the main it is by force of contrast with the customary looseness

and convention of the methods of description that the rare instances of close direct portraiture tell as they do. After "unda horrescit," "nox polum occupat," and the like, Virgil's "ignea *rima* micans percurrit"—which is very near Turner's lightning, and not the least like the toasting-forks and zigzags of popular art—comes with a peculiar vividness of reality. Here in Lucretius that—

> "taetra nimborum nocte coorta
> *Impendent atrae formidinis ora superne*,"

and—

> "Aut ubi per magnos montis cumulata videbis
> Insuper esse aliis alia atque *urguere superne*
> *In statione locata sepultis undique ventis*,"

and—

> "Devolet in terram liquidi color aureus ignis,"

are pieces of actual observation, as direct a seizure of Nature as Wordsworth's, as workmanlike, even, as Crabbe's. We did not exhaust all the matter, after all, in the texts we learned at school.

After muttering for an hour along the southern horizon, the thunder drew by on an easterly slant of wind, and the rest of the day was all clear sun and cool airs blowing from regions fresh-washed by the distant storm. In the afternoon the Warden came in, and we sat on the lawn and talked philosophy and Latin verse, as we do now and then, beginning this time from my morning's place in Lucretius. Men who have "kept up their classics" are not so common hereabouts that we

often fail, when we get together under the beechen shade or in the Warden's Green Parlour, secure from the outer world, to drift upon the old subjects. This is only when we are quite by ourselves; inasmuch as our friends of the neighbourhood, for good reasons of their own, refuse to believe that any one can be serious or quite honest in caring for the things he was taught at school. There is no harm in the arrangement; before the outer circle we discuss Betty Yarborough-Greenhalgh's engagement, or our friend Sims-Bigg's new motor-car with, I venture to think, quite a tolerable grace; and we retire at the proper conjunctions to our private whims, to *noster amor Libethrides*, with perhaps an added pleasure in the return. It is a pleasure which runs, I fear, little chance of being profaned by crowds in any time within our scope. I came across a place in Ste. Beuve lately, where he speaks of the impossibility of getting his audience to listen to the classics, in the severer sense: he will try what he can do with the older Pliny. If that was so, there and then, where shall we say that we stand to-day?

The Warden grumbles at the small proportion of high poetry in Lucretius—"all smothered in absolutely drivelling physiology: not one line in fifty that could stand by itself"—and so on, in his usual forceful way. He maintains that there is room and to spare for his manner of presenting things in gross; we have overdone the impartial

and judicial attitude; with our feeble means of expression, a thoroughly one-sided statement is often the only way to give the force of certain qualities. He thinks it is a pity that our present scientific hierarchs don't embody their discoveries in verse. They haven't even the chance of eternal poetry to buoy up their exploded theories two thousand years hence. They, who are so ready with the teaching of billions of years, won't look at the lessons of a few centuries, results almost under their very noses; they seem to think that somehow in the last fifty years or so we have got beyond the relative state of knowledge, and that since they learned to spell everything is positive. Lucretius was just as cocksure; but we have something to forgive *him* for.

I have a long-kept theory of my own, that one sure test of a writer's claim to be heard is his possessing a perfectly individual and unmistakable character and style. This works out, if any one will take the trouble to try it conscientiously, with curious consistency and far-reaching results. If you will only have dealings with works whose authors could not possibly have been some one else, the amount of impersonal systems and histories and criticism "expressed," as the reviewers say, "in direct and lucid English," well ordered and entirely common, with the man's soul and humour only coming through by means of negatives and uncomely lapses; the amount, I say, of this

"every-gentleman's-library" literature from which you will be delivered is a very considerable thing. In the classics, I take Lucretius to be a notable instance of the theory; because the personal expression seems to come and go pretty nearly in alternation, accordingly as he draws deep-chested breath in an exordium or illustration, or bites his nails over the business of shoving hooked atoms into unlikely places, or pretending it is all fair to give his cosmos, ruining along the illimitable inane, a little jog to make its parallel lines of motion meet in a procreant clash. I produce this theory of mine, not for the first time, perhaps; the Warden proceeds, as he has done before, to fit it into a corner of a roomier scheme of his own. He thinks that we can judge which philosophies and systems are in main intent and meaning true, and which are false from the bottom, by the test of their indirectness of expression. All the great true books are in oblique oration, by dialogue, fable and myth, essays, letters, drama. Whenever a man sits down to give us his cosmogony direct and complete, ground-plan and section, with data and appendices, his impersonal system and principia —well, he produces just "a standard work of reference." Plato and Aristotle are, of course, the two types which will always divide the world; and one may sort out their followers at one's leisure. You will find, says the Warden, that they hang together, and show their relationship quite curiously,

as a general thing; look, for instance, at Montaigne's literary likings. Sometimes you may have to read a man for just everything he didn't mean: Lucretius, for instance, again. One may leave alone all those miserable guesses about the size of the sun, and simple oversights about penetrability of matter, and so on; and read "Æneadum genetrix" for the fiftieth time, and never be tired of it.

I tried back to my own theory of the patent-mark of personal expression; that it all depends upon whether one looks at the world and life as a thing *per se*, sufficiently absorbing in its own laws and politics, or only as a symbol of something else, one vast complex mythus, as Coleridge says. Of course, if a man thinks he sees reflections of a finer light, or hears a strange tongue, he'll want to get something of the mythical into his work; to indicate, like a good sketcher, instead of trying to realise like a mere copyist. Besides, there are his own eyes to be thought of; he has to look for reflections, like Perseus with the Gorgon, not the direct light.

The Warden acquiesced, with less qualification than I am accustomed to, and our conference did not go very much farther on that point. We know each other well enough to divine instinctively a seasonable silence; and for half an hour, may be, the Warden made pencil notes which, I imagine, bore upon the great Theory, and I turned back to

my Lucretius again. I soon fell into that desultory state of apprehension in which one finds that a sentence needs looking at twice, and gaps of irrelevance lengthen down the page: I don't mean the bodily dropping-off, rational enough on a summer afternoon when the brain has been wholesomely exercised after lunch, but a lighter and more spiritual occultation, due in this case, I think, to the surpassing goodness of the day, the pure luxury of the air and light and garden-smells, and shapes of trees and hills, and colours of the sky, which fairly out-faced the crooked signs on the paper and all their appeal. I gave it up at last, observing that the Warden's pencil had lapsed, and his notebook lay upon the grass; and so I sat for a long while existing in the deep green shadow, imbibing the far-off light on the woods, and the rich vapours from grass and leaves and earth, vastly idle, and flattering myself that for once I was taking in, to my capacity, some little part of the immensity of good things which we are mostly too busy to receive, and storing something to remain, I hope, for less liberal days.

Yesterday was beyond question a day of the year—such a day as comes but once or twice in a summer, and is not immeasurably removed from those days of a lifetime which all men ought to have down in their archives. Its beauty lay in fine shades of difference, that will not go into

words. If one speaks of a perfect tempering of heat, light, wind: of vivid sky whose tender blue is by itself a still-fresh pleasure; of fields of pearly vapour low down towards the horizon above the violet bloom of the hills; of trees, shapes of massive sheen and hollow blackness; of perfume that suggests a hundred sweets of the fields or the garden and goes before the nostril can for sure discern bean-flower or mignonette or clover—why, that means nothing in the world to a man who has not the key to it all, and the man who has it will not thank you for telling him. It is all fine and restrained and evanescent; and you shall find plenty of people proof against its spell. I fear that most of the company that went from the village yesterday on their annual excursion did not think much of it. Mr. Myram—so his wife told me when I was down in the village this morning—took his top coat and umbrella with him when he started at 5 a.m. for the Crystal Palace; it looked unsettled-like, he reckoned; but he was inside the Palace all the day, listening to the great Brass Band Contest. That *was* lovely, he said; sixty-nine bands a-playing the same selection one after the other between eleven o'clock and six; that's what he calls *music*, and chance it, he says. Beats him, how the judges could keep it all in their heads, he says, but he 'spects they put down every mistake, directly they makes it. . . . To-day the weather is settled enough, the shining

grass is mown, the brassy heat chokes the sky with haze; the light is raw and glaring. Down in the village, where the smell of the brickworks tempers a suggestion of the effluent from the sewage-field, and a pettish wind whirls an eddy of dust and papers into one's eyes at the street corners, walks Myram expansive in an eighteen-penny Panama hat and a white waistcoat which already bears the print of sweating thumbs. "Ah!" says Myram, and Myram's circle at the eleven o'clock beer, "something like summer at last, and hope it's *going* to last, too!" The twist is altogether in Myram's vein of humour. I came, I confess, on the identical conceit in Sidney's "Arcadia" the other day; but somehow in Myram's mouth it does not seem to be in the right line of descent. Or is the fault mine, some uncandid difference warping my judgment of the contemporary wit?

It would perhaps be well if I only differed from our Alpheus in such matters of taste as wit and the weather. We are sundered by a whole sphere of subjects concerning which I clearly apprehend that he is safe to get his way. He stands for Progress, for Forward Policies, for the blessings of Science, for Education, in a manner which I think some better known professors of the faith might study with advantage to us all. I admire, in the primary sense of the word, a dozen distinctive qualities which make him in type the master of

the world—a gift of dealing with figures which I cannot sufficiently respect, a mind undisturbed by the slightest sense of beauty or humour in life, by the least consciousness of baffling incommensurable things just outside our scale ; a serviceable integrity which seems to preserve him conscience-clean in the muddy walks of local government and expansive trade. If his foot be fated to slide, it will be in the dim gyres of municipal opportunity. There is in the management of our little drains and paths a riddle, a mystery of iniquity which confounds the merely external critic. In the business there seems to be a mesmeric force, sufficient not only to charm aspiring units such as Myram, but to make whole bodies of comparatively cultured people, individually most amiable and upright props of rural society, to become accomplices in obscure obstruction and delay, impenetrable silences, whiffs of ill breath suggesting buried crimes, the dragging, leaden inertia of adjournment and the slumbrous brain. I read in the county journal week by week the proceedings of the various bodies who keep house for us, and I measure the worth of all their energies, their loans and Government inquiries, their election fights and Ratepayers' Defence Societies, their recriminating committee meetings and letters to the papers, by the undisturbed persistence of an open drain from the cottages at Tillman's Green, whose stench has made the highway hold its nose summer by

summer for eighteen years of my recollection, and seems to exist as a symbol of subtler taints in the air.

I know very well that the future lies with friend Myram and his kind. Indeed, I do not know what defence I should make, if he took the trouble to compare the fruits of his work and mine—his thriving days, his control of labour and handling of the national life, his solid worth and standing, his place in the world hacked out for himself: against all this to set my imponderable self and works were in all ways impertinent. In the village polity which I sometimes forecast, such idlers as I and the Warden—after several well-meant chances given us and incorrigibly made light of—will be extinguished for the good of a serious commonweal; and I doubt if either of us would under those conditions care to appeal against the sentence. We should have had our good and our evil things in our own way; we happened to have learned the etymologic sense of the word "fastidious," we had not the brave digestions of the Myram breed, and we missed the charm of wearing dirty white waistcoats and spats, and living in a terra-cotta villa with cement lions at the steps, of relishing the whiff from the main drain, and those spicy breezes which blow in Board Rooms and Council Halls; we let slide the chance of leaving a thumb-mark on the clay of the emerging race. Yet we had our private gains; we picked up and pocketed

sundry gifts which the victorious faction trod underfoot; we kept better company, I venture to think; if we wasted our summer mornings on Lucretius and his theories of the atmosphere, at least we did it for fun; and if under the crowning dispensation which I foresee the Warden and I should be led out to suffer together, I think we should have our revenge upon the executive body—as we have had upon other incarnations of the kind—in an impulsive grin at the humour of it all, when we were once outside the door.

And yet—and yet—one sometimes dreams one might get one's own way, and hew the Philistines, gently enough, without any world-shaking convulsion, after all. There is no divine hedge about the plan of government by a house divided against itself; nothing but an odd and as yet barely historical infatuation; there is no saying what solidity of national happiness we might not attain if public men were by some humour of fortune to compound their too lofty principles, and aim at relative, commonplace, feasible good in their experiments on the body of the state, instead of agonising for positive perfection, the transcendental glories of their platforms and their cries. Taste only exists to change; and one thinks that the run of luck must presently alter, and the possible combinations of change for the worse may be exhausted even in our own time. I may yet live to hear the Warden taking Alpheus and

his mates in Lucretius, and Dempster reading to his classes in Montaigne, and even find myself a personage in the new-based republic, having my say in the nicer, airier, gayer world, without even stirring from my post beneath the beech-tree shade.

XVI

July 17.

THERE are summer days—yesterday was one of them—when the world seems to kindle at the sun, when clouds, grass, waving tree-tops, green fields of wheat burn in the overflowing fire. A steady wind fans the flame; one feels the truth of the Lucretian touch of the sun "feeding on the blue." The roses haste to blow wide and fall, the strawberries colour hourly, and send their spice across the garden; the year is at the height, there will be no richer day this twelvemonth. The streaming plume of cloud that rises with imperceptible motion from the south to the zenith is as bright as vapours of earth can be: the leaves are white fire where the light glances on them above, and emerald where it strikes through; the swallow that sweeps across the lawn gleams blue on head and shoulder; everything glows, wastes, and consumes; and the expense of life is set before our meditations as at no other time. I have tried to make this impression of use and spending answerable for the regretful pang which sometimes comes in times of happiest weather; but that paradox is

one which goes beyond our best guesses. The attempt to analyse even so far as to suggest a hypothesis was unwise; it is a sufficiently vulgar error to make our half-decipherable alphabet of sensual forms the key of any enigma we may conjecture to be hidden under its signs.

Yesterday was Sunday, and some such meditations as these filled up a half-hour under the beech before it was time to set off down the hill to morning church, and another twenty minutes in the churchyard, while I read the old headstones and wondered once more what manner of men were my acquaintances Timothee Lintot and Cleophas Comber a hundred and seventy years ago, listened to the changes of the bells, and watched the swifts whirl across the dark of the yews or balance high up in the blue. Whenever the sense of the magnificence of human achievement is strong upon me, I like to go and look at the motions of those soot-brown wings in their miracle of controlled force. Every mode of their movement, the quick oaring flight, rolling a little from side to side, as a fine sculler may roll a little in the exuberance of his mastery; the climbing flutter, light as down on an eddy of air; the headlong stoop; the rush of the race from whose vehement *swish* one jerks back one's head instinctively, a twentieth of a second too late, in man's ponderous way, if the chances of collision had rested on the human judgment. I take an extreme pleasure in

watching any bodily feat thoroughly well done; the knack of even a second-rate batsman, the poise and shoulder-swing of a finished skater, the pause and lift of the mower, are all good things to see; and yet the hulking clumsiness of the best of human attitude compared with the motions of the beasts! The prettiest high-jumper that ever grazed the bar never came near the grace with which Nym clears a bramble spray in his hedge-bottom scrambles, tossing himself up and out from a standing take-off—every movement, from the flip of the ears to the crook of the tail, one piece of perfect rhythm. And, to come back to the swifts, I think no candid person could look at their career for five minutes without a touch of shame for all our monstrous contrivances of speed, our roaring, fuming, stinking machines, always ugly and noisome in ratio to their power, by the side of that silent economy of navigation, the enormous proportionate power of the frail wings, the control of steerage and arrest, the management of balance and planes whose first principles our toy-science still boggles at.

When the one-bell was near its last stroke, I left the swifts to their skiey exercises, and turned into the porch with the last stragglers of the congregation. Our church and its services afford, I think, less excuse than a good many others for the losing of the devotional in the critical faculty. There are remnants of ancient beauty in the building

which have survived the fury of two generations of restorers; but I sometimes imagine that we might put in a plea in defence of modern shortcomings in public devotion, if we were to allege all that we have lost in the way of encouragement, compared with the possessions of our forefathers, whose tabernacles were quick with fresh beauty, a piece of life coming out of their own hearts and heads. With the Warden in desk or pulpit we are at least exercised in godliness, if not always lifted up; the rude mouldings of capital and pillar, no rubbed-down template inanity of our own mode, tell us at least of grace, and, we like to think, of faith. We are not troubled here with passing fashions of church furniture which I have heard spoken of as "stately symbolism," and which appear to one of the profane as strangely tawdry selections from the catalogues of an entirely commercial ecclesiastical decorator. But we cannot escape from our east window, a tenth-rate specimen of the vogue of forty years ago, depraving our eyes week by week with its intolerable false scarlets and blues; nor yet from others of more recent date, which wait the damnation of the next generation, windows in a sort of Flemish Renaissance manner, with patches of unclean clarets and bottle-greens on large spaces of white ground; trade antiques, both of the genres, with a definitely irreligious influence in the direction either of debauched sentiment or naughty temper. It is

poor comfort to turn from these irritants, crude or cultured, to the faint stains on the wall above them, relics of pleated robe, of peacock-eyed wings, of an aureole and a face mild and placid as we could not conceive a face now; shadows of painting of the fourteenth century which have survived churchwardens' whitewash and the restorers from the Cromwellians to our own time. In like manner one sometimes escapes, in churches where they are very musical, from Dr. Sesquialtera's last new minor double-chant to sudden mercies of Battishill or Purcell, heart's melody after tormented noise, which takes hold of the drowsy urchins in the choir and the flighty young women in the aisle, and pulls them together all at once out of their semitone flatness, and perhaps into finer intonation of the understanding also. And through all such frettings and reliefs clearer and clearer comes the assurance that we have to do not with a matter of good and bad, but of right and wrong, divided by a hair's-breadth line whose position it much concerns us to ascertain. Into some such digression as this I have now and again been led, in yawning hours, let us say, of the Vicar's less fruitful expositions; but yesterday, when in the pauses of the Kyrie I heard the swifts shrilling round the spire high up in the burning blue, my thoughts wandered to the—

> "Happy birds that sing and fly
> Round Thine altars . . ."

of our morning hymn; and a man with a temperament as analytic as aquafortis may perhaps be forgiven for wondering why the saints are happier who sing out of tune in a close heat and aroma of Sunday-best, under the gules and azure of that murderous window. Perhaps it was in a momentary nod of oblivion that the rude arches, the dull warmth, the cry of the swifts turned to shadowy vaulting crossed by dim-streaming rays from a high rose-window, filled with the soaring note of an angelic treble. My wandering was rebuked by hearing old Tully's voice in the hymn, giving the florid tenor with unmistakable fervour of intent, and next by the sight of Molly Crofts in the Warden's pew, seen a moment between a pillar and the gay parterre of hats in that quarter, her face as she sang instinct with something that my reckoning had left out of account, a quality missed by the analytic temper and the discursive mind, perhaps a motion of the wisdom of which it is said that she passeth and goeth through all things by reason of her pureness.

After service I went on to the Almshouse, and while I waited for the Warden in the lodge-entry, I observed the congregation streaming dinner-wards down the street. Overhead the swifts still glanced and wheeled with their perfection of effortless grace, and never an eye was raised to look at them in all the company that crept along the earth with clumsy labour, with feet that trotted

or lurched or waddled or minced, but did not show—not one pair in a hundred—that they had ever approached the first rudiments of the art of walking. And from the feet to the faces was no better change. A bringing-up in Phidian ideals is a two-sided gift to a man; the failure of ordinary human features from the worshipped example may lie on the temper like a fretted wrong, and may add a last sting to the sense of one's obligations to "Progress." I think, from observations in other parts of our islands, that the people of this county are a singularly plain race; but at best the nation is far below the reasonable and practicable standard of looks. Here as the churchgoers filed past the archway of the lodge in the clear sunlight, I must needs turn my spleen upon the safe and solid resistance of general principles, as I saw the almost universal deformity, the blunted and flattened and twisted features, the signs of undeveloped nature, the trace of diseases new and old, the fret and burden of all shapes of unhappy soul. Downright forceful ugliness, a thing of character and humour, would be a relief from this reign of slackness, insipidity, vacuous asymmetry. Such a little amendment would often put all right! I find myself at times indulging a plastic instinct, saying that by flattening such a nose a little, bringing forward such a brow, patting out this hollow, pinching up that mouth I could botch the clay of many a hapless physiognomy into a practicable grace. It

is partly due to the Greeks and partly perhaps to an original list of humour that all my travels are a quest of good faces; roads and inns, market-squares of country towns, cottage gardens, the fleeting shoals of railway platforms or London streets, in all I seek the beauty of the old descent. The faces which I mark—one or two in a day's journey, perhaps—have a certain common character not easy to define; youth and a large degree of physical health are part of the spell, and I think ingenuousness and wholesome mind, and perhaps also a sort of pathetic expression, which for want of any rational cause I am pleased to attribute to the unconscious bearing about of a lost cause, the burden of a proscribed race. For of all generations of men we have set ourselves positively to deny the power of beauty; every device of our social economy necessitously destroys it; our very arts—not the toy-making of galleries and schools, but the workaday technic which gives us our lamp-posts and railway stations and shop-fronts—are an imbecile's outrage on the Muses. For the perfectness of pleasure in natural scents and sounds, we have the reign of stench and din; most of us will breathe the sulphur and soot of a railway terminus without disgust, as they will breathe the summer wind through a fir-wood without conscious pleasure, and will find their thoughts as much disturbed by the clanking and roaring as by the murmur of the boughs and the sound of bees in the heather.

We have our minds so constantly at the telescopic or microscopic focus that we lose the power of fixing them on the outward show of things at common range. The schooling which our excellent Dempster and his mates give to the rising race is perhaps the most sustained and elaborate attempt ever made to annul the senses, to put printed paper between us and the light, to prevent us taking into our own plain faces the least reflex of the beauty about us. Suppose that the arts are really as dead as they seem to be, and that we are right, not so much in preferring our stained-glass windows to the whitewashed fresco, or the crawling-alive hymns to Merbecke or Purcell, as in lumping all together in superior indifference: suppose that thus far we are justifiable, being as a nation too poor to allow ourselves any elegancies that cannot be hawked in the streets of the world; yet there are elementary dangers in an incapacity to note the differences of natural things, earth and sky and human faces about us. We never look at the clouds, save in some blundering attempt at forecast when we feel the rain on our faces; summer and winter hardly touch us but by discomforts of temperature; we rejoice in our thundering right line of motion with its appalling waste of energy, blind to the lesson of the birds' wings. If we but knew, we might condone our own ugliness, perhaps in time amend it, by observing the human beauty which now and then escapes the common curse. We

have definitely turned away from one of the first lessons of the human curriculum, perhaps the simplest and deepest of all; and we are already punished, blind and deaf in the appointed kind and degree.

I had left the lodge, as the Warden was long in coming, and turned into the garden; and I was running on thus to myself in a familiar strain, when I saw Molly Crofts coming down the long walk that leads from the Green Parlour between the larkspurs and the phloxes. She had taken off the buckler-broad hat which had kept in countenance its fellows of the mode, and with them had made the south aisle look like a flower-plot, and the sun shone very agreeably on the smooth brow and the crinkles of brown hair. She came on me at a corner, from behind a tall clump of sweet peas, and I had one of her gayest smiles, shining delightfully in the eyes before the mouth could begin to curve. Her look had something of summer Sunday morning in it, and I think kept still a little of the lifting up I had seen while we sang our hymn in such various strains. We made two or three turns up and down the walk together, and by the time the Warden joined us, surplice on arm, I had been able to remind myself of some half-forgotten qualities in those antique standards of mine, and to see how invincibly the great argument shows by the light of certain eyes.

XVII

August 8.

THE most inveterate anchorite in country solitudes ought to go up to London now and then; say, once a year. Until a just policy of decentralisation shall have brought to his doors a share of the good things at present stacked together in one noisy and malodorous region, there are pictures and music and—worst of all—people, not to be seen or heard without an occasional pilgrimage. But even without these reasons, a journey to town is worth its cost for the mere pleasure of getting back again. To know the full charm of the country one must escape out of the baked streets of August or November's dun shroud, straight into the breath of green fields or the mild sunlight sleeping on the faded woods. The dull roar of the traffic, the ceaseless tide of strange faces, the pallid smoky light, the complex smells, the sense of being swamped and lost in the press of life conspire to produce an obsession lasting through the sway and rumble of the sleepy afternoon train by which one's flight is made. Only when one descends at the little wayside station, where the

nasturtiums in the flint-edged beds greet one with a not unrecognised rusticity and the station-master's salute implies congratulations on the accomplishment of the adventure set out upon under his auspices two whole days ago, does one begin to resume one's individuality and the grateful ease of self-respect. The sight of familiar faces and the exchange of greetings in the accustomed formula over cottage gates and at due corners of the road go some way to break the dreary spell; but it is only when one turns, as the light begins to fail a little, out of the highway into the field-path, that the mind gets wholly clear of it. The scent of grass in the first cool of the dew and the sweet silence of the valley come in upon the heart with sudden tenfold charm—with the charm of privacy and quiet after the insolent interferences of town, of delicacy and fineness to a degree even till now unsuspected, the dearer for the recollection of coarse confusion which it breathes away. One's personality expands and reposes itself, no more whirled like a half-drowned fly in some gutter-eddy, but as one perched aloft among green leaves that preens its feelers and opens its wings to the pleasant air. A last countercharm remains to complete the deliverance. Once the garden gate closes behind the traveller and the *orbis terrarum* possesses its proper centre again, everything seems to have a new perfection, a claim and lien not credibly ever to be run away from any

more. The red pillars of the firs and their vaulted darkness never looked so solemn, the spaces of sky between them never so ethereally clear; the hush of evening was never so divine as it is to the wanderer who has won his way back to the upper airs from that grim underworld of town.

From my last expedition to London I travelled down with Mrs. Sims-Bigg, who is an old adversary of mine in the matter of town *versus* country; and our talk during the journey served to clear and define sundry musings which had infested my head during the day, and to start some new ones which for a while after continued to circle about the ground of the old controversy. If I failed to convert my enemy, as I seem to have failed on other occasions, I had at least the satisfaction of feeling the curious justness of my positions all the more soundly settled for the concussion of the fray.

The traditional cause between the country and the town—the "rure ego viventem, tu dicis in urbe beatum"—seems at length in the way of settlement, judgment going against the country almost by default. The contest, long waged with strangely equal fortune, has come to an end almost abruptly; within living memory the town, the urban taste and habit, has overrun and occupied the rural territory: quicker even than the waste of brick and mortar spreads across suburban fields, the influence of the streets has flowed over the rustic

mind and temper. Up to the time of our own recollection, the two principles kept a sort of balance, the rural simplicity and ruder strength, constantly drawn into the centre, maintained in mixture the best qualities of its proper force, and had in the making of the best English character a share insufficiently accounted of by most historians. Now the tide ebbs: London has brimmed over and run back over the old channels; the farthest sources of the earlier supply are swamped—"imis Stagna refusa vadis"—by the universal Cockney soul. A literary instance will here serve better than anything else—as it usually will—to illustrate the change: set such essential townsmen as Pope, Addison, even Johnson beside our latest Arcadian versifier or romancist of the soil, and hear in the first the sonorous timbre of native speech, the racy birth-note and vernacular thought underlying and giving life to all the courtliness or wit; in the second, observe the thin dentals of Cokayne all too clear beneath the disguise of studied dialect and sentiment. We are all Londoners now in our cradles, from Bow Bells to Berwick; and be sure the sister kingdoms have their proper equivalents. The trouble which we call the Rural Exodus is, of course, an actual measure of the town's ascendency; the decay of farming, already reduced in the nation's eyes to a make-believe industry, a mere appendage of sporting interests; the characteristics of rural

government and education, a ramification of nerveless tentacles, possessing the chilly stringency of an octopus, with an inaccessible heart somewhere in Westminster or Whitehall; all these things witness the destroyed balance, the new conditions of national life, the great experiment which is being made without data, whose possibilities are with one consent ignored.

To take one of these classes of evidence—obvious enough, perhaps, to incur the oblivion now dealt to all primary and fundamental concerns—London—and here, of course, London stands for all towns of mass sufficient to exert that fatal attraction—can no more produce its own muscle or intellect than it can its mutton or its roses; it must have its Smithfield for thews and its Covent Garden for brains, into which year by year pours the raw material for its manufacture. Failing the punctual supply from without, the country bone and blood to make policemen and porters, navvies and nursemaids, London would in a couple of months be stifled in its own decay. And the case is the same with mental repair; cut off the supply of solid—call it stolid, if you prefer the word—temperament, easy-breathed and of steady nerves; leave London for a twelvemonth to incubate its peculiar crasis; and it would be one Bedlam. As surely as its bread and its drinking-water must come from green fields and clean skies, the bodies and souls which it consumes

must be produced in regions beyond the reach of its contagion. And precisely as the tide of bricks and mortar ousts the last pretences of corn-growing in some half-rural suburb, so the spreading of the city-spirit over the country strikes at the supply of refective humanity. Corn and cattle we can fetch, for the present, from green fields elsewhere—even beyond the Atlantic; do we contemplate a provision of the other commodity from the same quarter? As the matter stands, it appears—to an observer here in the wilderness, at least—that our imports of this sort, as seen about the Port of London, are not of a type likely to repair our losses satisfactorily; but it would make no difference if the finest samples of mankind procurable arrived regularly in Thames or Mersey. If our isles cannot raise a population of a certain weight and girth, a certain soundness and force of spirit, the game is already up, and our destinies have passed out of our own keeping. We in the wilderness discover from our newspapers and reviews that the people who live behind numbered doors, whose view of the country's corn supply does not, as a rule, go beyond the punctual baker's cart, begin at length to see the risks, in certain contingencies, of our not being self-supporting in the matter of national provender. Coleridge's warning in 1834, that in depending upon foreign corn we forget we are "subjugating the necessaries of life itself to the mere comforts and luxuries of

society," is still in substance repeated; but not often his condemnation as false and pernicious the "supposition that agriculture is not a positive good to the nation, taken in and by itself as a mode of existence for the people." If the Fates are patient with us, we may yet learn in time that it is ultimately not the corn raised by the man which matters, but the man fashioned by raising the corn. The simple fact that without the bodily exercise of the soil and the sea a wholesome race cannot be reared is, as far as any signs of practice go, completely ignored.

Something in this sense, with the energy due to a favourite topic, and with a good deal of hauling the argument back into the right line from several sorts of tangential wandering, I had propounded to Mrs. Sims-Bigg, whose mental personality, if not by itself very distinguished, as a type may be said to touch the profound.

"'Ignored,' indeed!" she exclaims, with a suggestion of temper due, perhaps, to her not having had quite a fair share of the argument. "'Ignored!' when we are all trying to find how to keep the people on the land and prevent them crowding into the towns in that dreadful way! I suppose you didn't read Lady Estridge-Sandys' article in last week's *Leaven?* You ought to have been at a meeting I went to last week in Bossingham Gardens; the speaking was *admirable;* the Bishop *most* stimulating, and Miss Blatherwayt

—she works in Poplar, you know—so suggestive and helpful. '*Ignored!*'"

I said that it was one of the curiosities of the case that they were never tired of *talking* about the country; but that the country was waiting to see something done.

And who were "they," might she inquire?

"The Town, Madam, that has been pleased to 'take up' the Country, and being almost entirely ignorant of its wants and meanings, governs it, thinks for it, paints it, writes about it——"

Mrs. Sims-Bigg smiles rather provocatively.

"Ignorant of the country, are we? The best-trained and most advanced intellects are not able to grasp the ways of Little Pedlington, I suppose?"

I answered that I thought they *might*, if they ever came to try. At present London constructed out of its inner consciousness one of the most curious dummies ever made to stand for live fact. The townsman's fundamental mistake in dealing with country affairs is his assumption of inherent superiority. He has only to use his eyes: training? sympathy? acquirement of dialects of thought? He smiles the suggestions aside; what are the alertness and acuteness of the street-bred intellect worth, if they cannot dissect at a glance, dull, slow-moving Hodge? And yet, if poor Hodge, wriggling quite disrespectfully under the forceps, should venture to question the value of the results, it might be found that the investigator

had left something out of the account—protective devices such as Nature teaches the wild things; a strange refraction of the lines of thought, produced instantaneously between the two types of mind by their different densities; the exoteric forms of speech and expression, reserved for the aliens; the seven-times-fenced-with-brass reserve.

"'Reserve?'" says the opponent, with an intonation of reflective questioning. "Yes; only some people would call it hopeless stupidity, I think."

I told her that was, of course, the ground-fallacy of the whole position. If she would, just as an experiment, try to see that there is more than one scale of time, and that the straight line is not always the shortest: and would be ready to wait five or six years for the rustic nature to open itself out, and would not mind being laughed at meanwhile from behind the mask of what *she* called stolidity—with a few more such branches of learning—I should have hopes of her yet.

"Thank you very much! And your yokels, of course, see through us poor Cockneys as easily as possible all the time?"

I said I was quite sure of that. London views and London ways have a quite fatal easiness for Hodge. Our folk go up from the village very tolerable Arcadians spite of all the education they get, and come back in six months on a flying visit full graduate and most complete Cockneys. But

is it imaginable, except in rare conjunctions, that a born and bred Londoner could in any length of time learn the ways of the village and the life of the fields? The capacity which can "assimilate" the significance of the Borough or Hackney in a few weeks does not make much trouble of the solitary citizens that it may find straying in its fields.

And how long, Mrs. Sims-Bigg would like to know, have I been in getting to know the ways of this mysterious race? Well, I have lived among them getting on for thirty years, summer and winter, without many days' holiday; and I only *know* one or two here and there yet; for the most part one can see something under the surface, and guess at all sorts of puzzles, and learn not to be very positive about anything, except perhaps the sure and certain truth that there is not much to be learned about the rustic in a full house-party at Frogswell Place, or even in a series of summer week-ends in the country. From this point I took the war into the enemy's country, and went on to enlarge upon instances of the Town's amazing ignorance of us and our little likes and dislikes — the beneficent regulations which apparently do not allow for any difference between the conditions of existence in Lambeth and on Lonewood Common; the ghastly-laughable educational mixture which is served out alike to the small people in Rats' Rents, E., and to our

little Joskins at Trucker's Hatch. I tried to point out the difference, as affecting character and the humanities, between living amid the flux of undistinguishable millions and sojourning in a region where every face is perfectly familiar, and where every man's history is circumstantially known by each of his thirty or forty neighbours in the adjacent square mile of neglected fields. Was it not possible that the very simplicity of the life in the open air, the dealing with Nature and the elements very much at first hand, had its own gifts—intuitions and faculties in which we admit the ignoble savage to be our superior? Possible also that the streets, their restrictions of daylight and horizon, their ready-made provision, supplying all needs by the process of "going round the corner," took out of a man the qualities of initiative and resource, left in a large measure the machine-part behind?

I had begun to make some impression on my enemy's defences, as I judged by the perceptible decline of her interest in the discussion, when we came to the little wayside station, and I was able to tell her that I saw the cinnamon liveries and red wheels waiting behind the creeper-clad shanty which calls itself a booking-office. When the bays had gone by me in a cloud of dust, I struck into the field-path and found at once the tenfold charm of brooding quiet and such an impression of dear reality as daylight brings to the whirling fantasies

of dreams. I mused as I went upon the Mrs. Sims-Biggs of the world, who know the country just as tourists on the highroad know the scenery about them—woods, fields, roofs, village spires in a general picturesque, a mere sliding background to their travel—never thinking how the prospect may strike the dwellers among those obscure field-paths and lonely woods, the folk to whom every tree is a landmark, every meadow and copse has a name and character, every house a history. These saunterers on the highway, flitting through their week-end visits, their country-house summers; enjoying surface-pleasures of repose, of quaintness such as more saliently contrasts with the things of their habitude; half-hearing a strange language of thought, guessing at meanings by help of their own book-knowledge and traditions: these very people are, by Fortune's spite, the historians and physiologists of the rural world. They have no misgivings that there are obscure motions in the rural system requiring half a lifetime for their parallax; they make no allowance for refractions of vision and inconstant factors in calculation; they generalise and confound such detail as the distinctions of class, as sharply cleft at the bottom of the scale as anywhere in the region of their own level; they know nothing of the varying moral atmospheres of village and village, of the underground stirrings of political and social ideas acting on a purified democracy ever since the time

"Ex quo suffragia nulli
Vendimus . . ."

They are not concerned for the wiping out of the archaic and the picturesque—in far subtler ways than by church-restorations and the growth of "residential centres"—for the grey flattening and dulling of life coming on as quietly and comprehensively as a November twilight, for the rubbing down of all salience of character and marked degrees of good or evil into a blurred mediocrity. They appear to think that country dispositions have stood still somewhere about the phase which Crabbe drew, in this connection not giving enough credit to our own energies for the effects they have succeeded in producing—that stupendous uniformity and inclusiveness of our schooling, the abandonment of the old national livelihood and its result in new and wholly experimental conditions, the breeding of a race mongrel between town and country, a state of intellectual suspense and anarchy, the old inheritance lost and the new maintenance still to seek.

I had got so far in one more arraignment of the often sentenced offender when I met at the half-way heave-gate my old neighbour Jethro Tully on his way home to the Vachery, and found matter pertinent to the pleas in his salutation, in the complex meaning of the traditional deference and respect of lifelong use, crossed by a hint of Radical independence, in the veil of reserve rather

sly than shy, lifted ever so little at one corner as a concession to sixteen years' acquaintance, in a fundamental good sense and native breeding underlying all. We stood to talk a minute as our custom is, and in his half-dozen scraps of gossip the old man showed signs of a ripe wisdom in matters, and a dry, somewhat censorious humour. "*Density*," quoth Mrs. Sims-Bigg? Where is density like that of the brains over-centralised in some half-dozen square miles of foggy streets, minds whose rectangular plan of life and brick-wall horizon have dulled a whole province of perception, whose alternations of stuffy chambers and muddy pavements have plugged the finer senses as with an eternal catarrh? Oh tyrant London, blear-eyed blunderer, coarse-thumbed handler of fine-spun destinies with whose right twining the very life of all that monstrous bulk is involved, learn before it is too late to lighten the touch of those ponderous fingers. Learn for your own sake that there are qualities not to be found in your ganglion of the national life, yet vital to the whole body,—reserve, caution, slow-seasoned grain and fibre, an absence of "nerves;" learn that the nursery-ground of country solitude and silence is an essential preparatory to your forcing-house. You would understand, if you could but get the incantation of the "central roar" out of your ears, that the country is something more than a mere appendage of town, a convenient sanatorium or playground

for street-folk, a rubbish-heap for your waste humanity and bye-products of crime and insanity. We in the wilderness have already more than enough of your off-scourings; now we hear of workmen's colonies, of factories to be brought out into the fields, to save the congestion of the centre. It is all incredibly foolish: artisans' plantations and cheap trains, boarded-out children, fortnights in the country, deported manufactures all merely cut the tree at the roots and foul the stream at the source. If London cannot be made in itself a habitable city, it may as well be asphyxiated at once in its own exhalations as try to elude the fates by pouring its filth into the one source of saving health which at present keeps it alive.

The time will come, not a doubt of it, when the preservation of the country, body and soul, will quite suddenly appear to our governing orders as a really imperative thing; and then that precise amount of energy will be spent in vain whose square-root would at a certain conjunction have comfortably secured the result. We shall recognise the country as at least an equal in partnership with the city; there will be revolutions in methods of education and local government, and we shall see all manner of sumptuary laws and desperate encouragements of agriculture. Finally, we shall go forth in the guise of a Royal Commission to discover the lost secret of national existence; and —unless some rare chance is to divert our usual

mode—after much gathering and classifying of information, we shall find that we are just too late; that the secret is buried somewhere in the unturned London Clay; and as we go back to town through the waste fields we may perhaps catch an echo of the rumour once heard in an older Bœotia—

> *ἀλλ' οὖν θεοὺς*
> *τοὺς τῆς ἁλούσης πόλεος ἐκλείπειν λόγος.*
>
> "A whisper goes,
> The gods forsake the city to her foes."

XVIII

September 1.

COMING home yesterday morning from a visit to old Tully at the Vachery, I found myself, as I crossed the common at Beggar's Bush, engaged once more in an attempt which I knew at heart to be in vain, trying to make the familiar landscape yield up something of the inner beauty which it can put forth at its own hours. The day was clear and keen, with a somewhat garish sun and quick-pacing cloud shadows; all colour was pale and a little opaque. The long line of the Downs that lay like a grey vapour above the pale brown purples of the ridged Weald; the clump of wind-bitten firs that tops the hill—a landmark that has taken its part in many an unforgotten composition—were alike otiose and inert. All endeavours to conjure the latent spirit by insisting on this piece of colour or that sweep of wooded valley only recoiled in a dull dissatisfaction; and in due time I came to acknowledge that it was one of those days when a veil lies over the landscape or some hebetude dulls the eye; or when, as I have at times thought, there is some undivined

collusion between the seer and the seen, and the vision is at once withheld and foregone.

So for perhaps the hundredth time I gave up the attempt, and told myself once more how wholly vain is any purposed hunting for that finer spiritual beauty of a scene. The very thought of intent seems to shut sevenfold gates upon the magic realm that lies so close upon our road. Make your planned and deliberate expedition, a day's trudge through the hills—even a week in spring, it may be, among Surrey commons and green roads—and come home with your indolent recollection of things seen, commonplaces staled by a hundred old walks; then, looking back by chance from your doorstep you shall see perhaps only a fast-fading streak of rosy cloud, the end of a sunset which had left you cold, or a mass of trees darkening against a rainy sky; but at once you feel the touch of authentic divinity, a power to which your vacant perceptions answer instantly and absolutely. All the day you were a connoisseur, a virtuoso, and Nature evaded you at every turn; at the close you forget the quest, and she suddenly gives you a sign which in itself opens your eyes to see, a revelation which as it comes adds itself to the number of the unforgettable things.

The day being, as I said, a dead one, I let my humour have its analytic bent. Those deeper manifestations have no discoverable law or rule;

at most it can be said of them that the degree of their power is connected with their suddenness and their transience. There is no season or hour when they may not be looked for; but perhaps there are some sorts of weather in which they are less likely to occur;—times of repose and settled face, such as a sunless and windless November noon, a cloudless drought, or even those days of rich and sustained beauty, in the ordinary sense of the word, which almost always come in June. They are more frequent, no doubt, at the spring and the close of the day than in its middle; but they are not dependent upon the more dramatic changes of light and colour: they are to be found not only in the sudden sunset-break which fires a mountain-side and fills the valleys with smouldering crimson mist, but in the quiet fall of a drenched autumnal evening, when the grass lightens a little to the slackening shower and a bar of greenish sky shines between the stems of the black-glooming wood. Even the dreariest of grey twilights may at the last moment lift a corner of the veil to show a mist-blurred star, a swarthy flush of afterglow, enough to let the ambient mystery in upon the spirit.

The more a man betakes himself to watching and following the beauty of earth, the better he knows that it is not a constant quantity, as many seem to think, always at command the moment he goes out-of-doors. Any one who has paid

his due service to the Ilissus or the Melian Aphrodite knows that even a statue has its moods; as to the appeal of a landscape under the momentary changes of the season and the hour, it is strange if we shall catch it twice in altogether the same mode. The most we can do is to wait, keeping a clear mind, seeing to it that no internal distraction cloud or warp the mirror's surface. Though all deliberate intent most surely destroys its own ends, yet there are preparatories which contribute to the result—a "wise passiveness;" idleness, in its too little understood virtuous side; a temper of vacation perhaps innate; an eye not bent formally on its object, but turned a little askance from it, finding it as stars fading in the daybreak may be found by looking a little beside them. There must be, of course, a general faith in the coming and going of divinity; but no peering here and there for the symbols. The matter in hand most go on, like Nestor's sacrifice by the seashore; the quiet morning hour proceed with its reverent common forms of the rite; the lads must be there, the ox, the chieftain, the goldsmith with his tools; and then, unheralded among the rest, silently, the last at the solemnity—

ἦλθε δ' Ἀθήνη
ἱρῶν ἀντιόωσα.

But yesterday was altogether one of the fast-days, and I shut my door without having gained

the least suggestion of any finer illumination behind the common scene. Something of the trivial hour seemed to infect the course of one's thoughts, and once or twice the doubt came whether all this care and observation of natural beauty is not, after all, a morbid activity, a crasis of the over-wrought modern mind. "You," said the ill-conditioned fancy, "mewed up with your books and your theories, palpitating at some one's review, or irritated by some one else's new adjective, it is you who breed these subtleties of vision and heats of appreciation. To the great old men who put down the foundations you pile your flimsy structures on, the world was well enough, the sky was blue and grass was green, sun and stars and seas and winds had their uses; at most the sunrise or the storm-cloud got an epithet, a workmanlike label to serve through twenty-four books of epic. It is only now, when your neurotic multitudes, who never once in their lives drew a full breath or stepped a wholesome stride, it is only when the atrophied creatures huddle together in interminable streets that the sense of Nature-worship is born."

The peevish thought was not to be answered off-hand. It is, after all, only the course of Nature that people who walk a certain length of familiar pavement day by day the year round, and see, if they ever look up, a narrow strip of firmament, hazy-blue in a garish sunlight or orange-dun in fog, should like to hear about green lanes and

turquoise skies; just as the converse holds good, that ninety-nine of the folk whose ways lead, summer and winter, through green lanes, and whose roof from light to dusk is the open heaven, quite largely fail to appreciate the beauties spread about them. It is, perhaps, not too rude a proposition to say that the expatiation is in inverse proportion to the knowledge. It seems as though the difference in detail of scene-painting between the moderns and the older men were connected with the degree of intimacy with Nature possessed by their several publics. The archaic colourist, writing for his sunburnt, outdoor critics, set his conventional mark on sea or sky—*οἴνοπι πόνπῳ* or *ἄσπετος αἰθήρ*; it is left to the modern Academician to give us—breathing the dusty smell of the reading-room while the electric lights sicken in the shrouding fog—a sky "or sur or; les nuages d'un or clair et comme incandescent sur un fond byzantin d'or mat et terni," or "la mer . . . d'une certaine nuance bleu paon avec des reflets de métal chaud." In face of such achievements as these, it seems hardly doubtful that our seers and prophets—wheresoever their hearers may stand—have discovered whole new worlds in the notation of natural beauty. Yet there are arguments in the contrary sense which at least deserve a hearing. We are, perhaps, too ready to impute to all other ages our peculiar manner of putting all our strength in the front rank, or, to use a comparison that is

perhaps apter to the case, all our wares in the window; it rarely seems to occur to us that there may be any limit to an author's reach other than his power. It is at least possible that Homer's sea had that monotonous wine-colour, instead of peacock-blue and all the rest of the inexhaustible palette, by a quite deliberate choice.

And the earlier fashion of summary notation has evident virtues of its own; it may be found to be the only possible vehicle for the conveying of those rarer manifestations of light and form, always swift and evanescent in proportion to their force. In the nice choosing of adjectives, the search for synonyms and the projection of minute detail there lies the risk that the impatient spirit elude us, and we find the image we would record hang as a dead weight of matter on our hands. A single classic phrase—an epithet, even—may suggest more than a page of laboured "word-painting" can realize: the one is allusive, an indication, so to say, between friends with a common stock of quick-answering knowledge; the other too often seems but a careful and partly conscious endeavour to convey the detail of a scene to minds which cannot take a hint, nor fill in an outline from the stores of their own memory. One line of the classics may present, *to the man who knows*, a sense of the thing meant, much in the same way, and as absolutely, as the wet blur or solid blot of Turner's latest power gives its sense, with a kind

of shorthand which alone is quick enough for the fading light or the flung-out curve. That qualifying clause "to the man who knows," is perhaps the key to the difference between the two methods. The man who has the breath to take him up mountain-sides, and the eyes, when the summit is gained, to look behind him and below, does not need a chapter to recall the vision when he has come down to the plain again; a line, a pregnant word will be enough; Pindar's

> Ἀρκαδίας ἀπὸ δειρᾶν
> καὶ πολυγνάμπτων μυχῶν.

or, to fetch a parallel from the other extreme of the compass, Martial's

> Et curvas nebula tegente valles

will afford him all he needs.

So far went my analysis, filling up, as such exercises are surely meant to do, the dead spaces wherein we know no gods *φαίνονται ἐναργεῖς*. During the afternoon, given solidly to the garden, there were intimations that the day and the personal humour were both shaping towards better things. About dusk, when the digging had been fairly put through, I took a turn along the high-road and dropped a little way down the first steep pitch of Withypits Lane; and there, with my mind mainly running, I think, on the couch-grass roots which I had been wrestling with, I came upon, or there came upon me, in the dull close of

the undistinguished day upon the landscape seen a thousand times before, such a vision of inner beauty as I had tried to evoke all through the morning's walk. The scene was but the plan of the hillside over against me, the steep fields that drop to the brook in the bottom, the remembered pattern of their hedges, their solitary oaks, the long wood that crowns the ridge: in how many evening walks had I seen it all under the last of the sunset, darkening to a plane of dun-green shade, utterly silent and without the least stirring of life? I had turned out of the lane, a few paces across the grass to the familiar gateway, and as I leaned on the grey lichen-shagged bar the senses—not immediately, but after a minute's looking—suddenly penetrate or are penetrated; the world is transformed to a visage it never showed before, and will not show again. The smooth green fields, the dark mass of the wood, the pale spaces of sky and barred cloud reaching towards the north in a moment put forth their hidden power. One can but look and look, drawing quiet breath as though uninitiate and unawares chancing upon some temple-mystery; the slack-ordered thoughts, tangled a moment ago between a half-mechanic recollection of something heard or read, and the lazy aim that switched at the nettles in the hedge, fall at once into a wide-eyed calm, the very spirit of receptiveness, a lulling pleasure into which they sink as into the depths of happy-dreaming sleep.

Every part of the scene is wrought to a meaning of serene good; the hedged fields, the white cottage that shows like a light on the dusky green of the pastures, signify the grace of life in ordered work and ease; the mounded oaks stand like towers of solemn strength; the earth-haze above the fallen sun, swarthy orange with the reek of the dead day, cannot stain the immense clearness of the western sky. Such things as these, the approaches and degrees to the central light, come back to the mind that tries to recall the vision when it has passed: the supreme mythus divined behind the symbol is beyond the speech even of thought.

The lifted veil quickly falls again. The fire dies out of the afterglow, the clouds fade from their last pale purples to cold grey; but spite of the visible passing of the glory, the watcher surmises of a shadow that rises within himself; the senses tire, under the stretch of a greater effort of perception than he had conceived of. The vision passes; but just before it goes, there comes a motion of the will to grasp and hold the moment as it falls away, a sudden pang of regret, irrational and unaccountable, akin to that strong pathos which sometimes comes in watching the highest human beauty. It is easy to think of this as the mere heart-ache for our own transitoriness set against the changeless shows of earth; but those who have felt it think that goes deeper than any

syllogism of our making, has a reference beyond this frame of things.

When past any doubt the illumination is over, there is perhaps a momentary endeavour to catch the secret again, as one sometimes wishes to catch the broken end of a dream. But the thought is abandoned as it comes; it is best to turn resolutely away from the gate and leave the uninspired face of the hillside, the mist rising along the brook, the last glimmer of the west between the pillars of the wood. Turn away up the lane again; and while you feel a sort of wonder at an ineffectiveness, a sense of fault in all you see, in the dully reddening ranges of eastern cloud, in the uncouth shapes of trees, in the landscape where thwarted Nature and the indolent works of men interact in a confused meanness, let the mind go back along the trace of the lost beauty, perhaps to find a consolation, perfunctory but not unserviceable for the darkened way, in the fancy of some inheritance or right, implied in that vain regret.

XIX

September 10.

It is a weary business waiting for rain in a droughty summer, watching morning after morning the cloudless blue, or worse, the illusory shows of breaking weather and blessed showers in the windward, which raise and dash our hopes from hour to hour. There is a last worst state, when hope is tired, or too wise to stir, when the harm is done, the broccoli or the begonias past recovery, and the ultimate downpour becomes a matter of comparative indifference. It is not very good for the temper to muse in this strain amid one's wilting greenstuff and dusty seed-beds, while the very privets and laurels hang limp leaves, and the lawn is seared to a greyish brown. Walks across fields and by wood paths are better than the accustomed saunterings in one's own domain; the whole country is waste and sere, and the time is an interregnum; the stubbles are too hard for the plough, the meadows are fed almost bare; the woods stand a dark and lifeless green and begin to drop their leaves, shrivelled before they are

faded. It is not a much happier prospect than the garden offers; but at least one leaves one's private responsibilities behind one at the gate. I was out lately on one of these turns towards the Vachery, and fell in with Mrs. Ventom on her way home from market. The pony having cast a shoe, she had walked and carried her butter baskets all the way to Tisfield. The burden had taken nothing out of the spring of her step or the spare uprightness of her carriage; but I think it had contributed to a slight and quite permissible roughness in her temper. An encounter in the market with some one who, I judged, must have been ἀπειρόκαλος, unblest with the finer instincts, seemed to have ruffled her wonted calm. The lady—whose butter was notorious in all the parish, whose whole experience came out of half a dozen County Council lectures on dairying—had in open market expressed doubts as to the keeping qualities of the Burntoak consignment, and had advised Mrs. Ventom—*Mrs. Ventom*—to use more salt, and take more care about the making up. "I had it on my tongue to say something we should both have been sorry for; but there," says the widow, "I thought of her mother, that I taught to make butter long before *she* was thought of: one of the old sort, before they'd been long enough away from Nymans to forget what they'd been themselves. Well-to-do people, the Luxfords always were, of course; but the grandfather just

a tenant farmer. The old people were not the sort to shake their pockets at you, though they came into money twice, and had more than they rightly knew what to do with. There's hundreds more about like *her* now; and 'tis only themselves out of the whole country that don't know the difference from the real old families. Some learn it quicker than others; there's the Miss Walcots, now: their grandfather was miller at Westingham when the Luxfords were at Nymans, but they're the real thing right through—leastways Miss Fanny is: and Mrs. Sims-Bigg, she'd never be what you'd call a lady, not if she lived to be a hundred. And it's not so much what she said. I've known people a good deal rougher with their tongues, that you knew were all right the first word they spoke. Look at Miss Enderby, now; she can be sharp enough, but you've only got to hear her and Mrs. Sims-Bigg together. But she *can* be sharp, too. She was up at Burntoak last week, and she saw two texts that I'd put up over the dresser; my niece had sent them me—'Cast thy burden,' and 'Though I walk through the valley,' all in colours and gilt—pretty, I reckoned them—and she said, 'I see you're like other folk; nailing up texts on the wall out of the way, so's you shouldn't break your shins over them.' But the sharpest thing I ever heard her say was to the Vicar, when we'd been talking about Tom Finch, that robbed his grandmother

of her bit of savings, and his wife that used to shut the children out at night, and pumped on the little one when it was freezing. 'It's only very cruel people,' she said, 'that don't believe in Hell.' The Vicar coughed, and said something about Christian charity. He'd been much too easy with the Finches all along, some people thought; and Miss Mary looked at him as she knows how to look, and said, 'I wasn't thinking of Tom Finch and his wife, Mr. Blenkinsopp.' It's not so much what's said," Mrs. Ventom radically concludes, "it's the one that says it." I thought of Pamela Andrews' view of the matter: "but they are ladies, and ladies may say anything."

All this was unwontedly philosophic for the mistress of the farm; and we soon came down to more solid ground. The drought is a sore burden; water has to be carried to the stock from the brook half a mile away, and the house-supply has given out. "There's damp enough under the floors," says Mrs. Ventom; "I couldn't keep a carpet on the bricks in the kitchen, if I wanted to: as I told the agent the last time I sent the rent, the well's about the only dry place on the property. And next week, for all we know, we may have the floods out in the bottoms, and buckets in the best bedroom to catch the wet coming through the roof. We're always in trouble one way or the other. Most people seem to think trouble can only hurt you one way; but," says

the widow, with one of her material comparisons from the works of Nature, "'tis like boot-laces; it frets us if they're too tight, and it frets us pretty nearly as much if they're too loose."

By this we had come to the path which cuts the meadows towards Burntoak, and our ways parted. I held the gate open for Mrs. Ventom and her baskets, and received one of her magnificent sweeping curtseys, baskets and all, that majestic sinking and recovery which I should suppose would make Mrs. Sims-Bigg's fortune at a Drawing-Room—the hereditary obeisance which the widow maintains in a sort of jealous pride—I had almost said insolence—in knowing her station; it is possible that it has for her a connection with old fashions, greater than ours; in some cases, perhaps, it might express a lurking sarcasm. I should like very much to have seen the curtsey she gave Mrs. Sims-Bigg in Tisfield market after that reflection on the Burntoak butter.

When I came to the Vachery I found Jethro Tully thatching one of his own clover stacks. The one decent thatcher in the parish was busy at Naldretts fresh-healing the barn. Tully was not going to have his job done by either of the other two impostors who profess the craft. So, as rain might come along any time, he reckoned as how he'd got to do it himself. I sat on the stack-yard rails and watched him finish off the job, quick, thorough, neat-handed work, without waste

or haste. Here was skilled labour, at any rate—the drawing out of the straw from the heap, the laying of it straight with light, quick fingers, the fastening of the bundle in the clam, or carrier, the quantity exactly sufficient for the space to be covered, judged after an instant's measurement with the eye from below; the unhesitating laying on, combing down and binding in with the thatching-rods; the finishing touches to the edges with the shears; all this very pleasantly satisfied my taste for seeing anything thoroughly well done. When Tully had the whole thing to his mind, he came over to where I was sitting, straightening himself very gingerly; and leaning on the fence, began to accuse the disjointed times which reduced him, with twenty other things to look after, to thatching his own stacks. It was all depressingly perspicuous; the old ones, that had learnt what work meant, dropped off one by one, and the young ones were never taught naun but school-learning, and smoking cigarettes and sarcing their betters. 'Tis all made easy for 'em now; but he reckons there's some things as is only to be learned by hard work and taking pains. He used to walk three miles to his work every day at his first place, and that meant getting up at four, and back after seven. He was put on to mow with the men when he was seventeen; and you got to keep up with 'em somehow, and learn to sharp properly. There isn't a boy in the school now, he 'spects,

that could sharp a scythe or a hook, let alone mow. They don't *look to* things; 'tis all ready-made and take-it-easy; why ne'er he nor his father afore him ever *bought* a scythe-sned; they'd look out for a likely piece of hazel when they were in the woods, and then at the right time they'd go and cut it for themselves. And choosing a scythe-blade, now; people didn't seem to see no difference. Well, when he went to pick one, he'd wait for a sunshiny day, and hold it up 'twixt him and the sun, so's the light fell on the edge, and then, if it looked as blue as a harebell, you could be pretty sure that was a good one. So with knives; he'd often been asked to choose 'em for people, when he was going into Tisfield.

I thought of the thing defined as an infinite capacity for taking pains, and wondered what polar quality may be denoted by a nation's being mainly concerned to avoid all sort of pains or trouble whatsoever. Tully, I think, would have no hesitation as to its results; there is the concrete product before his eyes in the shape of his grandson Herbert or Erb. Erb, at the age when his grandfather was set to weed in the fields and mind horses, began to exercise his mind with recreative beads and bits of stick under a Government syllabus, and thereafter grew nine years in the atmosphere of the school stove and the odour of unscrubbed humanity, under the influence of the

blackboard and its chalky duster, and so became qualified to parse and do mental arithmetic and sing sol-fa, until he is projected complete upon the world, an under-sized, weedy cub, with small show of manners or morals, with one gift of shirking laziness developed in his atrophied little brain. He has been sent away to three or four good places, and after a few weeks in each is back again with his cigarette and his halfpenny paper on the wall by the pond, the gathering-place for all the tribe of skulkers, already something of a parish care and nuisance. If *he* had had the learning of him, says old Tully, he'd have made something different of him. For my part, I doubt it. I cannot picture to myself Erb turning out at five o'clock, keeping up with the mowers, or learning to choose a scythe: the creature that I know, under-sized and ill-knit, bleached by indoor air and soul-stunted by indoor thinking, with his stick-up collars and fourpenny satin ties, his cherished forelock, his language and his literature, is of another birth, a changeling from the stock of those old breakers of the glebe. *He* judge a scythe-blade by the blue glimmer on the edge? He can't even distinguish the tastes of the various poisons in his cigarettes.

They *won't* work nowadays, says Tully; not on the land. They don't seem to mind dirty jobs, or being in shops, and all that; but what he calls real pleasant work, they won't have naun of it.

I remind him of a modern instance. Our neighbours at Tisfield have—after the usual preliminaries of a newspaper warfare, party-committees, insinuations and recriminations, a Local Government Inquiry and a loan—embarked upon an ambitious scheme of drains. During the laying of the main sewer they managed to asphyxiate one navvy in the drain, and to blow another to tatters with a dynamite cartridge. The applicants for the vacancies thus created were ten deep; but as Tully says, for real pleasant work you can hardly get a man to look at the job. He reckons it's better for a man to be on the top of a stack than down a sullage-pipe; but there, you can't never tell. Seems as if they were reg'lar frightened of being out-o'-doors now.

I told him that people had lately proposed that agriculture should be taught in country schools. He smiled a little stiffly, as one smiles at the bad jokes of one's friends; and then I quoted the opinion of a great doctor of educational science which I had lately read, denouncing as reactionary and obscurantist any attempt to specialise the curriculum of elementary education before the age of fourteen. I put it to Tully in less specialised English than is usually affected by the people who call themselves educationalists, and was pleased to find that the objection which had occurred to me was the first in his mind. "'Tis people like that," says Tully, "that are killing the country.

I don't set out to know how any one can be such a fool as to think ye can start to teach a boy farming when he's fourteen, let alone filling his head with everything else first that he won't never want; but there, if you tell me as the gentleman said it, I suppose 'tis so; but I do reckon people like that ought to be shet up." Shutting-up, in Tully's mouth, has not the mere colloquial sense of suppression: it means Bedlam; and when one thinks a little on that excited defence of the existing plan of extreme specialisation, by which a boy is sedulously nursed into the desire of a black coat and an office stool, and a taste for halfpenny periodicals, and then, with this precious birthright assured to him, is left to follow the plough if he will, one is inclined to agree with Tully's prescription, unless it may seem under the imminent conditions simpler and more economical to provide well-fenced strongholds for one's self, and to leave the crazy world to run at large.

There was a little silence, and then Tully's justly balanced mind began to bring up from the stores of memory some of the less favourable aspects of the days of old. "Not but what," he began, "I don't say as there's not improvements some ways since I can remember, and since what I've heard my father tell of. I 'spect it was a bit rougher than what we should care for now. I can rec'lect the girls doing the washing out in

the yard in the winter, with their skirts froze hard about their knees, and they wore short sleeves then, and they'd sometimes chilblains right up to their elbows; and get two pounds a year for that. And the boys got knocked about a bit, too. Seemed they didn't think so much about things then. I rec'lect when there was no ceiling to the church roof, and the snow used to come right through into the chancel; the clerk he used to sweep it off the seats before service. There was none of these stoves then; and Parson Short, I've seen him blowing his fingers while they was singing the Psalms. It was rougher still in my father's time, I 'spect. That was when the war was on, and the French prisoners was kept at the old Talbot; old Jack Lelliot he'd often baked their dinners for them, and sometimes they'd catch a toad in the garden and put it in one of their pies. The press-gang was going about then, and you durstn't send a waggon to Lewes with two men, for fear they'd take one of 'em; if there was but one with the horses, they couldn't take him, you see. And highwaymen: the corn-market at Tisfield used to be at six o'clock in the evening, so's they could hear the price of corn in London; and sometimes when the farmers were going home, they were set on. My grandfather was once driving his trap from the market, betwixt Harvest Hill and Pain's Bottom, and he saw three men waiting to stop him: so he cut the horse, and

sent one of 'em flying, and went through without they touched him. And there's another thing that's improved: about the tithe. They used to take it in kind; I used to know the last tithing-man, when I was a boy: Freeman Blaker they called him, and he lived in Sher'n'am, where the post-office is built now. He'd come in harvest time and stick a bough in every tenth sheaf, and he'd have the tenth pig when there was a litter, and every tenth day the whole of the milk. I can tell you my father was pretty glad when the Commutation came in, and it was all done away with. People didn't take to the tithing; and can you blame them? If they was harvesting beans, or anything like that, they'd sometimes put the tithe sheaves in a bit of a stack, like, in a wood, and leave them there, and the poor people'd go and help themselves, and you couldn't blame them. And when the old tithe-barn that used to stand next the church was burnt down, there was nobody sorry, and some reckoned they knew pretty well how it came to catch fire. I've heard Parson Short say as how those that first gave the tithe had brought the Church more curses than they ever did good. Well, there's things like that where there's great improvements; but come to look at the boys and the gells—ay, and the men and women too—what they was then, and what they set out to be now, and 'tis an improvement all the other way."

At this point we left the State to look after itself, and turned to our private concerns—the neighbouring field of swedes starved for want of rain, the wells drained of their last muddy residue, the disjointed cycle of rain and fine. Before we had finished, the horses came in from the fields, and Tully had to go and see to their stabling. I turned for home, thinking as I crossed the stale dry fields and sapless woods of Tully's balances of better and worse, of prices to pay for things to have, of labour and wages, of the see-saw of reacting extremes upon which we live, making it our religion to drive each recoil more violent than the last. I entertained a vision of our public men doing their best to bring that vicious libration to a stand, instead of using all their weight to make the machine kick the beam for their party ends. We shall have to overcome a number of old prescriptions and prejudices first, no doubt, breach several bulwarks and rape sundry Palladiums of progress; but surely there are already signs of decay in some of those hedges of divinity, and the change may be nearer than we conceive.

I had taken a short cut through some pastures which landed me in face of an old stake and wattle fence; the crumbling bank and half-rotten lattice of stick and bramble made as awkward a barrier as short cut ever led to. I scrambled over at last, somehow; and as I stopped to clear myself of

thorns and litter from the hedge, I said to myself, with a parallel such as Mrs. Ventom would not have disdained, that it might be ten times easier to get over a stiff new fence than a rotten old one, after all.

XX

September 18.

An occasional invasion from the outer world serves very comfortably to settle the cloistered mind in its opinion of the goodness of its solitude. Thus when lately on a mild autumnal afternoon the Sims-Biggs and Mrs. Yarborough-Greenhalgh and her daughters chanced to jump with one another at teatime in one of their half-yearly calls at Lonewood, and found the Warden and Mary Enderby and Harry Mansel, who had come up to fetch certain flower-seedlings for The Laurels, my groves resounded for half an hour to a very tolerable imitation of the shouting cross-fire which in these last times passes for conversation. The reign of peace was all the fuller when the tumult came to an end, and I dare say one's wits were all the better for an involuntary souse in a breaker of that great tide on the shore of which I am wont to bask and murmur my *suave mari.* The Warden, my cousin, and Harry stayed on after the others had gone, and we went down the garden to get the columbines and pansy roots, and talked in our own way. Mary, I thought, bore a little hardly on the

young man, who was to carry the basket down to the village for her, with glance-hits at his extreme nicety of get-up, and his searching knowledge of the proprieties of life. The youth took it all excellently, with a show of ingenuous modesty; but I doubt if my cousin perceived a tinge of humour in his gravity which meant that he quite understood, and though playing feather-light, could easily guard his head. Mary has been pleased to consider him as seriously wanting in brains and a danger to his country, ever since he failed rather ostentatiously to respond to an attempt to communicate something of her admiration for Molly Crofts. She has told me that he was made in a mould; that there were some thousands of boys exactly like him in the British Army; and I told her if that was so, to thank Heaven that the country was not in such a bad way as some patriots were pleased to think.

The Warden turned back with me when we had seen Mary and her squire out at the field gate, and we sat and smoked under the holly hedge till the light began to fade. We ranged over a good deal of country before coming round to the inevitable master-theory. The Warden vented a little fume which he had been obliged to keep to himself when lately consulted by a committee of our intellectual ladies on the choice of books for a course of lectures and reading which exhilarates the winter months in our region. They had, of

course, made up their minds before they asked him, he says, and were going to plunge into Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus: of course, they never heard of Antoninus, and they call it Epictĕtus; but that doesn't make any odds. There must be something in stodge like that to attract the average female mind. He thinks most probably it's the want of humour. The real sense of humour is the admission of the incalculable, something elastic in the brain which will stand the shock when two and two don't make four. Of course, in a purely scientific age like ours, we can't expect any admission of that sort. It's a general plague: think of a sensible woman like Lady Anne, or nice girls like Molly bothering their heads about those two old fifth-raters or their modern equivalents, and ignoring all the real live stuff. He had talked to Molly about it: but it was no good; they'd got it all down in a syllabus now, with lectures by some poor devil who is trying to make a living at once out of his First in History. "Molly said it was so stimulating, and I told her it didn't sound intoxicating, anyhow. They had been discussing Marcus's views of immortality, and I told her he was one of those people who can only think of infinity in one direction, as if it didn't go both ways, behind as well as in front; and that we forget that God is as much smaller than we are as He is greater. I thought that would be a

stimulus, but Molly thought she was shocked. We are so serious now, that we can't imagine where the fun comes in to anything, even about ourselves. Our work is so strenuous and earnest that we are always in the thick of it, and can never stand back to get the general perspective. Look at the way Montaigne always keeps the scale of things, and can laugh at himself and everything else when he likes. But then he'd been in the world. He must have thought, sometimes, how his dealings with the Ligue, and the Mairie, and affairs like the muster of the troops in Bordeaux, would count towards getting a hearing from the right kind of people in time to come. We never get a philosopher now among the men of action. What opportunities even a man like Harry Mansel has with his Ghurkas in the Hills, and back at home every other year or so! It makes one sick of one's theories, nursed up on stale ground for fifty years together. There's a boy that has *lived;* two campaigns for his country before he's twenty-seven, snubbed and starved by the politicians till they want him every now and then to clean up the messes they have made. He's helping to shove the waggon, and we sit inside and squabble about education and efficiency. Brains? Aren't there *kinds* of brains, as well as sizes? Do you think we poky little people who sit at home annotating the classics, and wasting paper in offices, and lecturing to ladies on Epictetus,

could manage a hill-tribe that was turning nasty? I don't say there aren't set-offs on the other side. It's a pity Harry should have dropped his classics altogether since he left Sandhurst; but one can't have everything. I suppose it's all our personal freedom and high culture and precise thinking that prevent us having any Montaignes now. But we could do with one or two: the solemn strenuous people are not much good even at lectures; but when it comes to the whole government of a country being made of them, it is really rather awful. It isn't always easy to make out the compensatory advantages, when you get a fact like that to think about."

We were once more in the neighbourhood of the familiar solution, and the final stages of its development lasted until I had seen the Warden out of the lower gate, and had lost him at the turning of the field-path into the road. The theory ran still in my head for a little as I came back up the garden, thinking of an old contrast which balanced Montaigne against Plato: the Greek, with a divine stillness about him, knowing spells of strange power, shines with an anointing that eludes human holds; Montaigne is one of ourselves, goes down into the pit with us, puts on him the dust of mortality for the wrestler's sand. . . .

From a flight or two such as this I came down to the still September evening, the just-risen moon, near the full, hanging above the eastern woods,

the autumn flowers in the dusking borders, and the first smell of autumn leaves. My associative recollection answered at once to that mixture of impressions, and the shadowy rampart of the Downs turned as I looked at it to Allington Hills, the first horizon I knew beyond the bounds of garden-hedges or nursery window-panes—to Allington Hills as I used to see them across my first river of Sandwell stream. Both river and hills were part of a magic country, lying within a morning's walk of the common earth of lessons and bedtime and rainy days indoors. Sandwell, in his degree, and among civil streams, was surely one of the noblest that ever flowed—crystal clear, neither fast nor slow, equable both in drought and flood. Frost never bound him, for he had in him some volcanic temper, so that in hard weather his windings lay under a white veil of smoke ; and no fieriest dog-star had power to abate him an inch of his pride. Not for many a day did I discover that he came to us through no old kingdoms and far-off lands, not even through long valleys of our own shire, but in his main artery sprang at once to full span from the confluence of three rushing streams welling up marvellously amongst the houses and gardens of the village. The amplest of the three heads was housed in a sort of temple, the eight-sided red-brick well-house, always close-shut and mysterious, full of the sound of invisible springs. Another source came wavering into the light from

under a low dark archway in a park wall, and ran over yellow gravel alongside the highroad; the third I never traced to its spring, somewhere among the cottage gardens in Church Lane. The three main heads joined to make a broad shallow pool in the middle of the village, and at the outflow Sandwell began. Its silent stealth made it seem unfathomable to my early fancy; I must have been twelve years old before its olive-green deeps resolved themselves into a good mid-thigh in full channel. In holiday time I used to fish the stream with a good deal of application, but with an incurable and perfectly conscious unhandiness, and a consistent ill-luck which may have had a share in the making of a certain habit of acquiescence in failure, hardly proper for that age, but immoveable. There was a stretch called Dodgson's Piece, along one side of Mill Green Lane, which was free-warren and haunted in summer holidays by all the boys who could contrive a hazel-rod and crooked pin. There the trout were scarcely larger than minnows, and of a marvellous activity; but look over the upper Town Bridge or the lower Meadow Bridge, which marked the limits of the public water, and there in the cool privacy of lawns and gardens, under the very shadow of the arch, you saw the waving tails of the three-pounders who knew their station to an inch, and never showed a nose on the plebeian side. For a year or two I flogged the edges of the weed-beds with every sort of

home-made tackle, and after a certain birthday with a fine fly-rod out of the little barber's shop on the Mill Green; but I had learned my capacity, and presently turned to less exacting arts. The hills were my second pleasure; in the less active humours even dearer than Sandwell itself. Long before I had ever got any nearer to them than the river bank, they seemed to call me, stirring vague longings as the frontier of another world, a magic land where I fain would be. When at length I came to climb the heathy swell and stand upon the ridge, there away in the south, beyond the long fir-woods that sank below me, over the broad plain that stretched beyond, no nearer than they had been before, rose again the blue hills far away. Between the river and the hills lay the little town that still called itself "The Village," roofs half hidden among orchard boughs, old park elms, a grove of broad cedars. Beyond the houses came the open country, level hedgeless fields, softly blue at the season with acres of flowering lavender. All this realm lay towards the sun, away from the region of ever thickening roads and houses, and was on the edge of the real country; it was kept for Saturday walks and day-long rambles in the boundless ease and peace of mind of the first weeks of summer holidays; journeys that were always made, as it seems now, together with Barbara des Vœux. Those were the days when the chance of next-door houses made us fellow-prisoners at sums

and French, and constant mates at playtime in the back gardens or on Allington Hills. Over Sandwell by the Meadow Bridge a lane led, turning presently into a cart-track through the fields that were always rich with the smell of widths of peppermint and always abloom, as they remain in memory, with the soft violet under-heaven of the lavender ; and next into a high-hedged blackberry lane, winding and rising steeper and sandier till heather and fern took the place of the brambles, and all at once, over a bank of white pebbly sand topped with flaming gorse, rose the dark stretches of the glorious hill. Along the grassy clearings we ran our courses, and sat to talk among the sandpits and heathy brows, shut in from all but the warm blue and the sailing clouds. And so for two years the hills took on them their share of the spell, born of a passion restless, shy, infinitely sweet, with which my silent devotion to Barbara filled every place where she and I had been together ; but their true part in that conjunction I did not learn until Bab had said good-bye and gone away. Then, for two years more, as I looked day by day towards the old horizon, a gap in the ridge beyond the poplar clump showed me the way that she had gone, the way by which, I dreamed brave dreams, I should one day go to find her in the new world. It was early autumn when she left us, and in misting twilights all the levels below the hills were full of the smell of the mint-stilling ; to this day a

thought of the smell comes back with the moist breathings of September dusk, and brings with it a motion of the boyish grief. Two years I watched the edge of my world, faithful utterly to Barbara in some dim western shire, with such help as was to be found in two or three little pencil-ruled letters before the final silence. In due time the barbed shaft was drawn out of the wound, not without throes. It was a strange strife when I first felt past all doubt the change working ; there were strong vows to bind the slipping faith, execrations of the baser self, sudden stealings-back of the old tenderness, desperately sad and dear, before that devotion wholly passed. It left its trace behind, and even now, in September evenings when the level mists thicken along the fields and the smell of dead leaves hangs about the walks, I find myself still looking away to far-off hills and thinking of all that Barbara taught me first, by Allington Hills and Sandwell stream.

XXI

October 14.

As I crossed Hangman's Acre yesterday on my way to the Vachery, I wondered if I had ever seen a fouler day and a more desolate spot together. Hangman's Acre is a plot that may well have a curse on it—low-lying, waterlogged ground of so villanous heart that not even thistles will thrive there; it was once sown with oats by a new tenant, and the four-inch straw still litters the stitches; the stunted oaks, the Dead Man's tree amongst them, starve in the thin clay; the hedges are run wild, and broken at the fancy of any strays. There are plenty of derelict fields in our region, but none to touch this miserable piece; and I sometimes muse whether, in that Clearing House or Court of Transcendental Equity, which I hope to see one day at work, I could not claim damages for the perpetual depressing influence of all these acres of unutterably slack and slovenly farming amongst which I take my walks. The wilderness is one thing, the busy works of men another; but this confusion of thwarted Nature with human failure is one of those things which shrivel the soul. In

the middle of such thoughts as these there came the sound of a right-and-left somewhere down in the valley, answered instantly by the kok-kok of a pheasant close by in the copse, and I made a note —for the six hundredth time—of the quarter to which my claim for transcendental damages must be addressed. If the land were in poor case, the weather matched it. In a general way I pour healthy scorn on people who are afraid of country ways and country wet. The man who shies at a mile or two of muddy lane, whose dismayed mind yearns instinctively towards his wonted cab-rank when the pelting shower catches him in the open plough, is a mere "product of civilisation," and is all the better for an elemental wash. We, who have to trudge our two or three miles of streaming road to get a postal order or a bottle of physic, in black winter nights when we must feel for the hedge-bank as we go, with the north-easter gnawing the windward ear and pinching our finger-tips in his vice, we know the inward heat, the long thoughts that clear and shape themselves while the body holds its mechanic pace along the solitary way. We would not change those silent tramps in the rain or the starry frosts for all the flare and sociable hubbub of Oxford Street itself. And then, what would April, what would the sweet of June be, if they were not honestly bought and paid for, earned and learned by the full reckoning of the winter wild?

So much for all honest bad weather; but there is a sort that is vile beyond all treaty and the sanctions of human fibre, and in these latitudes largely due, as I think, to modern and artificial states of the sky. There is often in an unadulterated north wind that which makes one understand at once why the Devil is said to sit *in lateribus aquilonis;* but when a peculiar dun gloom, an olive-hued, throat-catching fume, a sting in the rain perhaps partly chemical, are added to the miserable hour, the soul of the toughest rustic cries out as against unfair play. There is war without truce between man and Nature—

> "Pater ipse colendi
> Haud facilem esse viam voluit . . ."

grant that from the hardness of the world use extunds various arts, and that our wits are profitably sharpened by cares; yet if there be a suspicion of added handicap, the transition from braced energy to listless depression is one of the shortest in life. All the Virgilian plagues, the blights and weeds and birds and weather, one can face with a stout courage; but let a man begin to see behind the primordial contest the new odds of legislative interferences, municipal smoke-plagues, economic weed-plagues and bird-plagues, and it may go near to break his heart. Without this uncovenanted advantage, storms and seasons buffet us in vain.

From the weather and the scene at their worst I

was glad enough to get into the lee of the farm buildings at the Vachery. After the raw wind and the puddled furrows, the smell of the wood smoke blown gustily about the yard and the dry footing by the ricks lulled the temper with a luxurious sense of refuge. The daylight, a wan gloom at the best, had begun to thicken before I reached the farm ; and when I knocked, the house door was already barred for the night. After due parley, almost drowned in the uproar made by the dogs, I was admitted, and found the household settled in for the night, the men drawn round the kitchen fire while supper was making ready on the long table in the middle of the room. It was a patriarchal composition. Jethro Tully, the master, sat in the inmost place in the chimney-corner, his white beard and wrinkled face lit by the blazing stick fire ; next him his two sons, strong-faced, middle-aged men, grave and silent ; beyond them the carter-boy and a little sickly grandson of the house whispered and laughed together on the farthest bench. The elder son's wife, a spare, hard-featured woman with invincible eyes, and her niece, a slight, fair-haired girl, moved to and fro about the table in the flickering light. The two terriers and the sheep-dog, their dutiful alarum discharged, lay at length before the hearth, serenely forgetful of rabbit-burrow or miry fold. The wind rumbled in the chimney, and now and again sent a blue haze of wood smoke across the room, to

mix with the fine hungry smell from the great black pot, whose lid chattered and steamed above the crackling bavin. The room, though bare of all but the first necessities, had a look of persuasive comfort. The shining slabs of the oak table, with its darned but well bleached cloth, the heavy benches, the single armchair, the tall clock, the gun slung over the chimney breast, the sheephook and old green umbrella behind the door made one reflect not quite contentedly on one's own ingenious superfluity. The brick floor, the capacious hearth, patient of muddy boots and paws, show one's Persian apparatus of carpets and hangings in a new light. The master of the house in his simple state is the true aristocrat, deriving his descent straight from a gentry far beyond our short-legged pedigrees; and before his patriarchal throne by the hearth I—an unclassed Ulysses, wandering at a loose end for many a year among men and matters—behold in Mus' Tully not so much Eumæus as Alcinous himself.

I settled the small business I had come about; and my account for sundry tackle from the woods, spray faggots, ether-boughs and thatching-rods was audited and receipted by the scholar of the house, little Alf the crippled grandson, the only one there, I think, who would face the business of writing his name. There was a little time left before supper was ready to set on, so I sat with my steaming boots on the hearthstone and led old

Tully on to ancient history. As is generally the case, he needed very little leading. I sometimes compare his mind to one of our thick-standing woods, which will return an echo as clearly as a hillside or a house-wall. My due remark about the roughness of the weather brought an answer at once from his close-set memories. There had not been such a wet winter since 'fifty-one; but that was worse, a good bit. There was hardly any corn sown right through till the spring. He was at Hoadly Hill then, and there they always reckoned to get their corn in by Old Michaelmas; and they managed to, somehow; and after that, when 'twas so wet, they kept on saying "Where should we 'a been? . . ." Terrible wet it was, day after day; they was wet through all day, sometimes, and no fire to dry themselves by; took their things off wet at night, and put 'em on wet again in the morning. No, he doesn't reckon it hurt them. I look across at the old man in the firelight and grant—by all our country standards of well-favouredness—that he does not seem the worse for all that hardness. Something of the lean face, the angular bent figure is perhaps due to such experiences; something too, I think, of a look of refinement, a filing-out of grosser elements and an expression almost spiritual, far too rare among the present race.

Well, Tully is saying, other people of course they got their corn in late—all anyhow, most of it;

and it was rough right through the summer. That made the price go up; that and the Crimean War afterwards. Terrible poor stuff, most of the flour was that year, and wouldn't bake; sometimes they'd have to take it out of the oven with a spoon, and sometimes it'd spew right out of the loaf, like. Wheat was up to twenty-eight pounds a load in the war; old Mus' Luxford, up at Nymans, he'd kept his back to make more, and it come down to fourteen pounds in one week. No, there was no bad times, not hereabouts, as far as he could recollect; things seemed to go on pretty much the same as usual. He reckoned the men on the farms weren't no worse off than what they were now. You see, 'twas better farming then. He goes on to enlarge, in a way I well know, on the sins of the modern farmer: the uncleaned dicks, the wet hungry land, the weeds. . . . It was better, time back; but 'twas never very grand round about here. No good land to be seen, they used to say, from Grinstead steeple.

I told him I had been at Southover not long before, and had seen the bullock-team going to work, one of the few remaining in Sussex. He remembered when they'd bullocks all about here—at Burstye and Nymans and High House; some were Sussex and some black Welsh. The bullocks at Hoadly Hill wasn't shoed; they was never on the roads. He'd seen them shoe the Welsh at Grinstead Fair; held 'em down with a prong over

their necks—a funny job that was, too. They'd two bulls at High House then : tremendous strong, they was ; if a waggon stuck anywhere, and four horses couldn't shift it, they'd put they bulls in, and they'd fetch it out as easy ! Why was they given up ? Well, some people said it was the cattle-plague ; but there !—they'd sim'd to make up their minds to have done with 'em, 'fore that come, though they couldn't rightly say why. The bullocks was better'n horses, some ways ; they didn't *snatch* at their work, and they didn't make such a mess of the ground with their hoofs when 'twas wet and bungey. Why didn't he have a team himself now, ay ? He only shakes his head at the question : there are difficulties, of course ; the stoutest of us owes a sort of allegiance—at some certain interval—to the spirit of the age.

One of the best qualities, as I think, in Tully's histories is the way in which they grow out of each other ; a single name or a date sets him off on a fresh line of reminiscence ; but this tangential habit needs at times to be held in check, or the listener might never reach the end of any given legend ; and it is sometimes well to be provided with a decent pretext for breaking off the interminable series. It is enough that the year of the disappearance of the last yoke of bullocks from Hoadly Hill happened to be the first of the ministrations of Parson Short in Sheringham parish ; we are at once in the middle of an account

of the state of things which that notable reformer found awaiting him in the early 'forties. I hear of the manor pound, and the stocks, and of one Andrews a sweep, who was the last man to be put in them ; of the Petty Constables, chosen for a year, of their insignia of staff and handcuffs ; of old Finch the shoemaker, who held office when the village was full of navvies working on the new railway ; how there were fights behind the church on Sunday mornings ; "and we boys, we'd slip out as soon as we heard 'em at it ; and old Finch he'd come to them when they was sitting on their seconds' knee—an old man, he was, and he knew if he was rough on 'em he'd like as not get a black eye himself—and he used to wear big round glasses, and he shoves them up on his forehead, and he says, 'Well, my men, when you've had enough,' he says, 'we'd be very glad for you to leave off ;' and sometimes they'd stop, and sometimes they wouldn't. The navvies they was always fighting ; and that set others on fighting too, and a deal of wickedness. Well, when Mr. Short come, he soon stopped all that on Sundays. You see, old Mr. Budd as was before him, he'd let things go pretty much as they liked, and he was often away in London or Brighton, and nobody to take the services. I've known a body lie a day-two in the church, 'cause there was no one to bury it. Well, Mr. Short, he reckoned to make alterations ; and he had the church cleaned right out, the dirt and the bats and

the owls and all; then he started the schoolin'; got a master and mistress to teach us; up in the long room at the Dolphin, that was. The only school I rec'lect before that was up in the strong-room over the church porch, and that wouldn't hold more'n a dozen or so. And, you see, it wasn't as if he was getting money out of the living; not above twenty pounds he didn't; the great tithes all belonged to old Mr. Tree; they'd been in his fam'ly ever so long, and *he* was in the Queen's Bench, and he used to come down to the place sometimes in the summer, and lived in the old parsonage, what they calls Sheringham Court now; two or three weeks he'd be there, and always an officer with him, and then he'd go back to the Bench again. Wonderful what Mr. Short done for the village, while he was here; and if it hadn't been that there was one or two against him, that had no call to be, he'd have made it a different place altogether. Who was that? Why, the people that was at the Park then—always a bad fam'ly they was. They was agin' him from the first. And Parson Short he spoke to 'em straight about it all; and so they was agin' him all along; and it seemed as how they was too strong for him, and at last he had to go. It was but a little while after he was gone that the old gentleman died in his chair at dinner. I rec'lect the funeral; I never see the church so full, but not an eye that wasn't dry in it. I went down into the vault while it was

open; there was four or five coffins there, with coats of arms on 'em. There was none on *his;* more like a parish funeral, it was. When the Park was sold, all the place went and had a look at it: you see, they'd been regular afraid of the house while the old man was there—'Little Hell' they called it; and the people went looking into all the rooms, some of 'em half frightened, and some making fun of it, and saying they saw a black man behind the door, and such-like. Seemed as if everybody was glad to think that party was gone for good and all at last."

The pot-lid had been clacking to an unmistakeable tune for some time, and the comings and goings of Mrs. William betrayed anxiety about the dishing-up: so when there was a great boil over, and rushings and outcry of the women, I seized the chance of the interruption to old Tully's chronicle, and took my leave. The night looked black and struck rawly after the glow of the kitchen; and it was a dreary three miles home, with a restless wind roaming the desolate fields like a presence, sounding far or near in a plantation or high-timbered hedge, going by in a chilly gust and leaving a dead pause. There was a narrow rift of greenish sky in the west, and now and then Venus glittered out through the folds of cloud, to shine in the pools of the drenched cart-track, and more than once so to save me a deeper plunge. I thought, as I went, of Tully's histories,

and tried to shape out something of the life of the parish sixty years ago, a scene of ruder energies and, I think, larger liberties than ours, a rougher, heartier plan of living, a stronger-lined picturesque of character, a much greater width of extremes. No sign here, at least, of the hard times, the tyranny and subservience which make such a figure in Cobbett's "Rural Rides," and as certainly nothing of the buttercup-and-daisy idylls of Miss Mitford's "Village." I believe, for my part, that Tully and his kind—for he is only a fine example of a considerable school—are in the true mean between the pitchy chiaroscuro of the one style and the coloured-crayon touches of the other, painters of "the real Picture of the Poor," of the truth of country life as our grandfathers knew it. Ruminating such comparisons as these, I found myself at the field gate sooner than I had expected; and when I came into the still warmth of the study, lit by the hollow-fallen fire, my eye fell on a certain eight volumes on a middle shelf, and I told myself once more that Crabbe was the man; that, after all, there was never any one in the world yet like him for the presentment—perfectly, or dreadfully balanced, as you will—of the rustic soul.

XXII

December 12.

COMING home from the village on black winter nights I can so far sympathise with the ordinary townsman's dread of country solitude as to conceive of possible grounds for his delusion. When one turns out of the snug room at the Lodge or The Laurels, passes the shop-windows shining on the drenched pavements and takes the muddy road for home, one has an inkling of the sensations of those larger children who dread loneliness and the dark. At the turning where the companionable noises of the village are left behind, and where on moonless nights the light of the outmost oil-lamp fades on the shadowy hedges, I can imagine the dismay of certain people who are not good company for themselves, if they had to walk into that wall of impenetrable darkness, and fare forth solitary towards the silent house waiting them at the end of two miles of uphill and wicked way. I can conceive of the fact; but the wonder of it grows on me every time I make the journey. The mere fitting of one's self into one's own angle; the taking possession of one's undivided monarchy;

the yawning welcome of Nym who knew his master's step at the gate far too well to bark; the clink of Lucy's oven-door or hiss of pan; what load of naughty pride or frost of custom can make a man slight the greeting of such things as these? Who rather would not find that the difficulty lay in being—

> "Not too elate
> With self-sufficing solitude"?

I read lately amongst those strange documents of the human mind the correspondence columns of certain Church newspapers, the plaint of a man who professed a nightly horror at the thought that when he had shut the door of his country parsonage at 8 p.m., no one would knock at it till the postman came next morning. To my cast of vision that seems absolutely the position of a lost soul. Heaven help him! Was there nothing available to replace the birdseye and the clerical shop of his colleague on his way home from the Institute, the politics and sociology of his cheesemonger churchwarden? Was he afraid of his dreams? Did he know nothing of burrowing back shut-eyed into one's memory and living with mighty pleasant company, minds and faces worth ten thousand of the tangible people he wants to sit with him to scare away the bogey of vacancy? Didn't he—putting on one side the translations of the Fathers, and the Pastor in Parochiâ, the

Preacher's Promptuary, the Liddon or Farrar of his allegiance, and of course the correspondence columns of his Church newspaper—didn't he *read?* Or did he belong to a library, and consume his novel-of-the-week, his light and heavy magazines, his epoch-making science, all to fend off the horror of having nothing to do but think, stuffing the aching void with the first mast or stubble that came to his hand, using all that printed paper as so much tobacco-leaf, burnt to steady the nerves, to woo sleep? Anyway, he never knew the meaning of a book. They are not books, in the finer sense, which come into the house in parcels, chaotically incompatible, and after a week or two depart without regret, a little looser in the binding, a little more thumb-smudged; their matter sucked dry and thrown away, the orange-peel of literature. Books are property, in the accurate sense of the word, personal belongings with their own standing and habitation on familiar shelves, to be found without fumbling in the dark; they have outward characters of their own as well as inward, idiosyncrasies of form and bindings; they have been in your service, the greater part of them, thirty years, let us say, and they will stay on your shelves as long as you can need them, and a little longer. In their matter, they reflect your taste and leanings by their range and their limits; they are all sealed to you by your bold or whimsical autograph, by the pencil ticks which mark a beauty in your

particular genre, a handsome seconding of some favourite heresy of your own, by the annotations and parallel places which link them to their fellows above and below. These I call books, the tried friends whose leather coats begin to show a sympathetic crack or two as your own case wears a little the worse for the turning over of the world, whose matter has gone to make part of your inward contexture ever since you began to go to school.

Of this sort are the rows of brown backs, with here and there a chance vanity of second-hand vellum or new livery of buckram, neat but not gaudy, whose gilding catches a glint from the low fallen fire when I come into the warm lull of my burrow from frozen journeys; such the good company which puts out of mind the binding frost upon the garden or the winter storm sweeping across the lonely fields, and has power to fill most of the corners of the empty house. I keep no unmanageable rout, needing step-ladders or catalogues. My odd hundreds have multiplied by the relaxed standards of age beyond the rigid limit of an earlier choice; but perhaps for some little time past have approached their full number. I have nearly all the old books; and the new ones grow ever less indispensable, more and more obnoxious to the wise man's objection, "ils nous empêchent de lire les anciens." And by the old books I mean the real ancients, the first fathers of the rest, the backs in Leyden calf or Venetian vellum,

which seem to inspire in most visitors to my shelves either a puzzled shyness or an almost personal animosity. I sometimes make a guess, while I warp one of the brown folios over the log-fire on a winter night, how many others in this most leisured county may be busy with an author of that standing: fifty, I make it, when I am in a sociable mood; when the pride of singularity swells, I doubt of five. In either frame of mind, I am happy in thinking how absolutely right is the choice of the real classics. It is, after all, well to begin at the beginning and know something of the hard-wrought alphabet which all our later exercises lazily shift and combine, perhaps with a consistently decreasing power of seeing the symbols in their true scope and force. And then, what a security and an economy of energy in using the result of Time's sieve! There are few things in life which so affect me with a comfortable wonder as the absolute fixity, beyond any sort of appeal, of the court of ultimate judgment in literature; the conversion of the weathercock opinion of contemporary criticism, right by chance and wrong by instinct, into the immovable security of the full orb of time, is a cheerful miracle which might keep even a weekly reviewer from despair. To my mind, there is a natural barrier between us and the books of our own age; coeval literature is flesh of our flesh, and it needs a generation or two to intervene and attenuate the affinity in order to sanction the

commerce. There are, of course, very obvious rejoinders to be made to this position, rejoinders invincible for those who translate the world into their unhesitating terms of white and black, and solicitous enough for those who seek the necessary half-tone among the infinite greys. By this restriction a man lessens his chance of that purest glory, the hailing of a rising genius under the neglect or the hooting of the crowd; of finding the enthusiastic shilling which he gave for a paper-covered set of undergraduate verses growing, after twenty years' burial, into profuse guineas in a discerning world; and he is, of course, open to the charge of bondage to dead minds and the unfruitful past. People like Mrs. Sims-Bigg, for instance, prefer to choose for themselves: Mudie's list and a pencil and their own will free as air, unfettered by musty rules of dead old Greeks and Romans or anybody else, thank you! Yet, my dear Madam, are you, after all, wholly unchained? I seem to recognise an almost nervous watching of the literary modes, somewhat after the pattern of the lynx-eyed solicitude to which you chiefly owe your fame in your hats; you want to know what other people are reading; you make a note of what the Duchess told the Under-Secretary to be sure to get; you prick your ears at the pealing brass of the literary advertisements. If neither of us is to be trusted to forage at first hand for himself, I would much rather, at my ease in a cool

cave, sip a vintage sealed down two thousand years ago than try ardent spirits six months in bottle; I will carve for myself from my ice-preserved mammoth rather than take a tepid modicum of meat chewed for me Eskimo-fashion by my neighbours at the feast. Each must answer for himself: to me the safer part seems to be not to try to help Time with the momentary sling of his winnowing-shovel, but to be content to grub in the heap of corn that lies at his feet, secure from all the winds of heaven. Therefore my book-case contains as a basis, in all sorts of editions, from the safe comment of Gronovius to the jaunty graces of Gildersleeve, the Greeks and Latins pretty complete. I read through them at a steady plod, and when I reach the gate of horn in my several journeys, I presently turn about and begin again: and on the whole I get more pleasure from the dead languages—spite of the drag of an inveterate hobble in construing—than from any other sort of reading. This judgment, though it amuses some of my acquaintance and seems to irritate others in a surprising manner, is deliberate and mature. There are those who are instinctive classics at seven, and remain prize schoolboys at seventy; it is another matter to scrape through a casual Pass under protest, and after certain experimental excursions to settle down, unbothered by accents and led by no specious lure of philology to make the classics the main indoor business of one's

days. That the Greeks and Latins wrote amazingly better than many modern novelists, and are a great deal more amusing than most plays; that there may be more downright human interest and colour in a historian two thousand years dead than in yesterday's "word-painting" by special correspondents, and more practicable politics in Plato than in last night's debate: these claims one deprecatingly advances from time to time to one's more indulgent friends, and retires before their smiles to the safe covert of singularity whereto no one offers to follow.

Beginning at this foundation I build forward the courses of my shelves pretty closely with the classics in the larger significance of the word; in the lower tiers there are not many gaps; but the nearer the orders approach to the profusion of our own time, the oftener comes the unexpected hiatus and the more freely I take leave to dispense immortality on my own terms. At the near edge of the past, where the great judgment is—spite of a deal of current assertion — not yet finally confirmed, I indulge some very decided aversions. There is less presumption in the position than might be imagined: there can always be found some weighty champion of one's dearest heresy, and one's offence need rarely be anything more than the ranging of one's self under one or other of two standards. If I fail to prize a robustious poet whose rhymes appear to me to fulfil the office of the pinches of

gunpowder at the elbows of a cracker, and whose general philosophy impresses me as a sort of view-halloo of the Unseen, I join myself to another bard who seems at least to own the Virgilian trick of making his lines sing. The boundless capacity of taste possessed by some people is a thing I always admire; there is not a product of the age like our strenuous Mr. Dempster but can swallow absolute incompatibles together; whether he possesses a palate, I cannot say; but his impartial maw concocts at once—thanks chiefly, I think, to "University Extension"—Mill and Ruskin, Shelley and Herbert Spencer, Thackeray and "the greatest living master of romance," without an apparent qualm.

Catholic tastes like Dempster's would find the gaps among my moderns too large to be forgiven. I take my stand on a principle something like Montaigne's "l'idée de ces riches âmes du temps passé me dégouste de l'autruy et de moy-mesme." I am definitely for the ancients; I am too lazy to do my own sifting; I will have my Bavius, my Trissotin, my Blackmore and Tickell already ruled out for me by the unerring pen; I will not be troubled to identify their inevitable antitypes among the swarming immortals of our own hour. After all, though the gaps be wide, I have been forced to admit not a few of the veriest moderns. I like to think that I see in them authentic touches of the true descent; yet I would not insist upon

their immortality on the strength of a predilection of my own; I would rather allow the chance of my forecasts being wrong, as a set-off to my impregnable judgment of the past.

The winnowing of Time, though it irrefragably keeps the true corn and sends the chaff down the wind to oblivion, yet sorts the grain into several parcels; and among the secondary men there are some who seem to be in a manner cheated with a somewhat unsubstantial honour, the mere fame of fame. The difficulty of being generous to the absolutely great and at the same time just to the second order is enormous, perhaps insuperable, and founded on dimensions beyond our scope. For instance, it does not do to think of Virgil and Lucan together. Lean a little towards the lesser man, and it is quite possible to find his force make the Æneid seem more than a little shadowy and diffuse. Grant to the full Joubert's objection that force is not energy; that there are authors who have "plus de muscles que de talent;" that force is a quality "qui n'est louable que lorsqu'elle est ou cachée ou vêtue. Dans le sens vulgaire Lucain en eut plus que Platon;" yet something sticks in the mind and avenges the lower genius—the recollection, perhaps of moods when with Montaigne we preferred Lucan's "subtilité aiguë et relevée" to Virgil's "force meure et constante." In our justice we are necessarily ungenerous. Even without bearing in mind that

Lucan died at twenty-six, a balanced critic will judge that here the sum of praise is not a thing that can be divided; the greater poet must have it all or none; we have, so to say, to give the lesser his meed while the other looks away. The difficulty will afford a nice exercise for critics who are untroubled by doubts as to the relation of the part to the whole.

The lower room among the immortals has its own compensations—a proportionate safety from the dull ass's hoof, from the annotating critic, from "University Extension," and such summer fly-blows. I sometimes imagine a calm corner of the Elysian fields where walk the subordinate immortals, masters in their own realm. There, I fancy, are to be found Xenophon, Lucan, Lucian, Catullus, Seneca, Butler, Berkeley, La Bruyère, Donne, Gray, Crabbe, Hood—a mixed multitude, an election to outrage the seemly sober critic, only defensible by the plea of a personal warp of humour. To this warp I would allow a much larger room in the choice of books than it usually receives. General taste in reading is a phantasmal thing; to have any profit there must be the personal liking or disliking, a nexus where the author may catch hold; "aliquid inter te intersit et librum." The impersonal relation in which many people stand towards their books seems to me to imply a tragic waste of human effort. Unless a man has his

personal friends and his enemies among his authors, instinctively chosen by likeness or difference of humour, by contrary virtue or friendly vice, by south sides or shady corners, by idiosyncrasy of sweet or sour, all his application is a dreary futility, mere waste of spelling-books at school. Naturally this intimacy is more easily admitted by the secondary men: and perhaps we are, after all, apt to be rather too easily familiar with the thrones and dominions; it may be better on the whole for a tenth-rate mind to accost Shakespeare with less cheerful assurance and to find his account with, let us say, Sterne or Sheridan. The heroes of the Elysian suburb all offer, to my thinking, some peculiar handle of approach and converse, and are, I think, substitutes, sufficient on the whole, for the sociable pipe and the friend who "drops in," perhaps even for the company of some customary household gods. I say nothing here of the absolute great, whose very names sound their own preparatories of solemn music, who require some offering of grave leisure and the purged ear. For hours that are without question common, a man will do well to keep a shelf or two of the minor immortals.

I say "keep": yet the other night when I took down a little crook-backed Menander and saw on the title-page above my own hand the brown inscriptions: "Judocus Bol Lugd. Bat., 1652," and

"Joshua Mercer, S.T.P. His Book, 1778," there came to mind the truth that instead of our owning them, it is we who are the temporary pensioners of our books. The buyer of new editions and virgin bindings obscures this truth from himself: it is the old broken calf, the dog's-eared scribbled pages which tell us that we are perhaps but the twentieth guest at that table. Who was Joshua Mercer, I wonder, who tried little pieces of metrical Psalm-version between the scraps of Menander, and announced with a nobly confident quill that this was *His Book?* Can it be mine, too, I muse? Even in the present we begin to lose our precarious seisin: as a man nears fifty, he comes to know that he has read such and such a book for the last time; others, both high and low, we shall re-read perhaps to the last, but we have said good-bye in the world of script, according to our turns and humours, to Longinus, let us say, to "Clarissa," to Froissart, to La Rochefoucauld, to "Redgauntlet," to Borrow, to Hosea Biglow, to Charles Kingsley—to afford a hotch-potch wherein most tastes may perhaps find something to their account. It is well to bear this in mind, and to think sometimes of the reflux of the tide which has thrown together here on the little shelf these spoils out of the riches of the great sea. In the snug firelit room on winter nights, when the grace or laughter of the old text speaks in one's ear almost with human intonation, it is good once in a way to remember

the dust which gathers for a little time on the unopened pages in the quiet empty house, until the "dispersion of a gentleman's library" breaks up the treasure and scatters the old and the new to other shores.

XXIII

January 20.

THE troop of children that has trailed slowly home from school, dropping detachments at cottage gates and field stiles, finally scatters at a corner where a finger-post offers the handsome choice of direction, *To London; To Trucker's Hatch.* The main body, in charge of a biggish girl, disappears among a group of estate cottages on the highroad; a little company of three strikes up the narrow turning, and begins the last stage of the seven miles a day to school and home again. The lane is a rough one, and any one who has stood in some wintry twilight to watch the little regiment defile down the hollow between high bramble-grown banks till the last of the stragglers are swallowed up in the misty gloom of a vague tree-hung bottom, may perhaps be set on thinking about the two ends of that muddy or dusty trudge, the long march and counter-march day by day for some eight or nine mortal years; and wondering what sort of provision awaits the travellers at home, and also in that other headquarters for whose requirements the

whole mighty manœuvre is at work. If the explorer take the turning to Trucker's Hatch, he will find that the lane soon becomes a green track, and widens out into a long strip of ragged common, a few acres of pasturage struggling with gorse and fern ; a little farther on he will come to two or three fenced fields, a black-timbered thatched cottage leaning perilously over its potato-patch, and a tumble-down little farmstead—a squat brick dwelling-house, an iron cart-shed, one hayrick, a desolation of disused fowl-houses and empty styes. This, common and houses together, is Trucker's Hatch, with a population of nine souls. Its school contingent is now but three small girls ; it is three years since Willy Avery from the farm and Joe Mace from the cottage passed out of their Standards together, and there are no lads at present at the Hatch to take their places. Willy, best of boys, a model for attendance and attention, devoured the learning fed to him with the methodic regularity of a chaff-cutter ; he won a scholarship and was sent to the grammar school in the county town, and finally fitted himself for a clerkship in a suburban bank. Joe, tormented with vast labour into a semblance of reading and writing, is at length delivered by the age-limit from the unwilling hands of authority, and in a few months of blessed holiday forgets all the lessons of his bondage. He forgets the frightful presence of the sums which he used to chatter

in his sleep, the frantically conned page which flickered before his eyes ; he does not as yet forget the impression of eight years' assiduous contempt from the master, as for a sort of changeling in the educational household, a creature of a lower order, made the derision of the class and the especial foil of his mate the conquering Willy. Even when the thing called Nature-Study impressed itself on the great motive intelligences of the sphere, and in due season came down to the regions of Trucker's Hatch, Joe did not get the chance that seemed to be thrown in his way ; he, the silent stalker of hedge-row mysteries, cunning in traps and snares, learned in nests and eggs and wild flowers, got no hearing at all from Mr. Dempster, enthusiastic in the new subject, getting up the position of the pole-star from a textbook, and after a half-holiday's field expedition sending a brace of cockchafers to the Warden for identification. Joe's hand, which went up in a quite unwonted way when the new lessons began, soon learned to keep its place ; and the study of Nature is inculcated without any difference to distinguish it from the rest of the time-table. But all is done at last, and Joe is free to live the life which, for as long as he can remember, has been put before him as little better than a beast's. The beasts that he knows are always friendly, at least ; the big, mannerly, sensible, honest farm-horses are far better company than the tyrant and his myrmidons the

pupil-teachers. Joe would like most of all things to be a carter-boy, and have horses to look after, and learn to plough like his father. But as no one seems to want a carter-boy, he is put to minding the stock on the common, half a dozen poor cows and a pony belonging to the farm. He idles the day long about the gorse clumps and beds of bracken, often alone from daylight to dark; he talks to Duchess or Soldier for company, cuts patterns on hazel-sticks or plaits rushes, and fills his hat with blackberries or nuts; the events of his life are the coming of the Wednesday grocer's cart, the chasing of his charge out of a neighbouring mangold field, and the stopping of the ever-fresh gaps in the neglected hedge. This repair he does to the utmost of his skill and materials, with a sort of make-believe of man's work, driving his stakes and wattling in the boughs with a touch of ancestral skill. A week's downpour under the shelter of an old sack sets him on building for himself a little bower framed of hazel-rods, the walls stuffed with fern, and the roof of grass and rushes. He fashions a door to open on withy hinges, and windows wherefrom to observe his herds, and here he sits through dripping days, making his toys or playing on an elder whistle airs rude enough for Tityrus, till the gathering dark tells him it is near the end of his day, and he may call the cows together and drive them home. He rarely takes the old road down to the village;

sometimes he is sent to do the Saturday marketing and finds old school-mates serving behind the counter of the general shop, or sauntering up from the cricket field. At the general assembly of the yearly Fair he meets others of his own time, entered on various careers—one in the gardens at the Park, one in a training-stable, others on leave from the regiment or the ship. He envies none of these their lot; there is only one with whom he would care to change places, George Prevett, the cowman's lad at Frogswell, who had the same desires as Joe, but has had his wish. George leads the plough team, and goes to market with the bullocks; he does hedging in real earnest, with a billhook and hedger's gloves of his own; he helps the thatcher on the ricks, and goes out, whistling in solitary importance, with the old mare in the cart to carry clover for the stock. He looks down, it is to be feared, on the hapless cow-tender, and the sting of his superiority goes home.

Sometimes on Saturday evenings of summer weather there comes across the common a traveller oddly out of keeping with the scene, whose black coat and town boots have fared ill in the five miles of dust between the railway and the Hatch. Willy Avery, coming down to spend a Sunday with the old people at the farm, nods and gives the familiar "How's self?" as he passes the ragged figure perched on the accustomed gate, or stretched at length beneath the shade of the gorse-bushes. At

such moments of obvious comparison, how does each view the other's destiny? What does the bank clerk at a pound a week think of the cow-minder, counting slow hour after hour in all weathers about the lonely common for his bare keep; and what does the creature of boundless leisure in sun and wind say to the slave of rigid rules, shut in at eternal sums till the level sun strikes in over the wire blind, and dismisses him to the streets and his stifling attic? Willy reads his newspaper, and perhaps by this time has gathered that there is among thinking people a reactionary tendency to consider him and his kind not so purely the salt of the earth as Mr. Dempster in school gave him to understand that they were. Joe Mace reads nothing—not even the literature which lies at hand, the scraps of the county journal which the grocer's cart drops, and the wind disperses about the gorse on the common—and with no one to tell him of wonders, he may spend his whole life after the present idyllic fashion, and never know that any one has doubted the perfectness of the method of reward and discouragement under which he was reared. It will be an ironic turn of fortune, not without precedent, perhaps, if Willy should feel the set of opinion and, conscious of round shoulders and pale blood, learn the easy catchword about the land; while Joe, tough-framed, tanned and bleached by sun and weather, idles about the waste acres, never to put his hand

to the desired carter's whip, nor to have a bill-hook and hedger's mittens of his own. For him there will be no new fancies about the significance of the symbol where the lane's end joins the high-road : *To London ; To Trucker's Hatch.*

The last time I was at the Hatch and had a talk with Joe Mace, I left him at the door of his wigwam, busy with a sundial which he was fashioning out of a bit of slate and a hazel wand, to tell him, within an hour or so, when it was dinner-time. I came home the long round, by Nymans and the Park gates, nursing a simmering grudge against Dempster and his ways ; and when I reached the Green, I found mine enemy talking over his garden fence with the Warden. The Doctor came on with me, and the schoolmaster went back through his weedy and neglected garden-patch to his fireside, his pipe, and his book again. At the turn of the road I looked back and made a summary note of the phrontisterion in its elements : there stood the gaunt building, part old cement and part raw red brick, built at the lowest tender, its skimped utility joined with a curious waste of semi-ecclesiastical ornament ; there was the miry, dank playground, the perky school-house with its slatternly blinds and neglected garden ; and in a stuffy room my fancy saw the long, ungainly figure of the master, his narrow face bent over his book with the frown of strenuous assimilation. He was reading, the Warden told

me, a new monograph on Education and the Rural Mind, improving himself, as he never ceases to do, and removing himself one more step from the barbarous void of yesterday. He had shown the Warden the book, and had flourished a little upon the new horizon opening before the benighted dwellers in the fields; there was something about the "nobilaty of laïbour," says the Warden (dropping into a peculiarly horrible inflection which, for an alien, he has caught pretty nearly), and about "interéstin' the children in the loife of the fields and the 'edges." Excellent, said the Warden: he supposed they might teach the boys to plough, for instance? "Nhaöw," replies Dempster, swelling with the pleasure of imparting a fundamental truth. "Nhaöw; but we shall teach them to *mâik* pleaöws!" "I didn't ask who was to use them," said the Warden; "he'd got as much as his head could carry for one day. What do you think of his idea of taking classes over one of the farms, and giving them object-lessons?"

I told him what I thought of the several elements of the scheme: Dempster's qualifications for the job, who was born in Hackney, whose soul still inhabits the Seven Sisters' Road: the boys, many of whom have lived on farms all their lives, and have a finger-end knowledge of the things which Dempster guesses at out of books: and old Tully or Mrs. Ventom as a likely third factor in the proposed invasion of growing crops and hedges.

Yes, the Warden had thought of that side of it. On the whole, he fancies we are somehow not getting full value for our money and trouble in the schools. Is Dempster a particularly bad specimen, did I think? I told him I had known others not much better equipped for their trade. There are, of course, worthy and amenable souls here and there, chiefly, in my experience, to be found in the smaller schools and lower classes; but in general there seems to be a common stamp of a remarkably well-defined capacity and interest; a summary, coarse-fingered dealing with children's minds; a consuming zeal for "Progress"; and an unresting self-assertion, a prickly jealousy for the status and profit of the profession. Dempster was once discovered weeping, heart-broken under a tree at a school-treat, because his wife had not been asked to tea on the Vicarage lawn, but had been left with the village mothers in the tent. He loses no chance of arranging a date or writing a letter on his own motion. He thinks London is the world, and is never tired of telling the children, with jeering comparisons, that they are a backward and benighted race. He wreaks against antiquity a spite which almost seems personal; all that is old and peaceable and slow is held up as anachronous—a crime against the new order, before long, one infers, to be fitted with proper penalties. On the whole, I don't think we are getting a good return for our expenditure on the schools.

Of course, the Warden says, we haven't made the least attempt to get the right sort of men for the work. "C'est l'effet d'une haute âme et bien forte, de savoir condescendre à ces allures pueriles et les guider," he quotes. By the way, he hears that in France they have quite taken up Montaigne lately as an authority on education. He wonders whether we shall ever find in England really able men going into elementary school-teaching as people go into mission and slum work, and that sort of thing? But about Dempster and his kind: if we could get people to look at results for a minute, and leave principles alone for a bit, wouldn't there be some evidence as to the working of the plan? Of course, it's safe to fly straight in the face of any modern *general* proposition: the common party-opposition always goes for cavilling details; no one thinks of questioning the fundamental lie. I give the Warden my impression of some twenty years' output of the phrontisterion—the dull mass of mechanic learning, forgotten in a few months after the discharge; the large proportion of feeble wits among the scholars; the half-dozen brilliant minds that have won through the press, taken county scholarships and attained positions as clerks, like Willy Avery; the spoiled rustics, cheated of their vocation, like Joe Mace. There is enough to condemn the system in the vicious circle of its ideal: it cannot make men and women for the world, but turns

the minds which show a little more promise than the rest into yet more instruments of its own machinery, pupil-teachers, certificated masters and mistresses, initiated into the sacred mystery and tradition of the status and interests of the teacher. And in all the eternal squabble about the educational machinery, you will never hear the least question raised about the quality of the learning it supplies.

Of course not, the Warden agrees; that would be far too direct, and too near the realities of life. We have civilised ourselves altogether out of our hold on fundamentals and live fact, and we can only fumble with derived and secondary relations. It is mostly due, he thinks, to the way in which just now all place and power has been secured by the clever people, the capable business folk, strong heads and thick fingers, who have shoved the rare heart-thinkers, the real vivifying geniuses, out of practical politics, if they have not got rid of the breed altogether.

We came hereabouts in our discussion to the Almshouse gate, and went our several ways. As I came home by the field-path, I dreamed of impossible conjunctions by which our Joe Maces, on their drenched and lonely commons, and the topmost powers of the department in their official residences could be brought together without any intermediate Dempster, and given a sight of each other's minds. I think Joe would understand;

as to those public men, I have doubts. At least, they would not care, any more than they do for any other matter of vital need that is not exploitable to party ends. As they tug at head or feet of the body politic to gain the *ἔναρα βροτόεντα*, they have no time to think whether the soul be not already gone out amid the uproar and bloody dust. There is, of course, a reckoning for all this: in the sudden cool and calm of that vestibule into which every fighter steps at last, stands Tisiphone, to deal with the strange breed of statesmen who turned their hands against each other and fought for fighting's sake, while they left untouched not only the matters intractable save in a settled state of internal peace, but the precise and fatal sum of all the true necessities of a state.

XXIV

February 21.

I SOMETIMES amuse myself, when I have spare time on my hands in the village, or when the Warden is not at home, with usurping a place among the old men on the southern bench in the Almshouse quadrangle, and fancying myself a pensioner with the rest, a fellow on the foundation, finally berthed in that harbour of ancient peace. The gate stands wide all day to invite the worldling; the dark archway of the lodge frames a glimpse of lawns, of white pigeons on lichen-covered tiles, of weathered buttresses and trefoil-headed windows, keen and clear as images in a camera obscura. Once within the quadrangle, the wanderer finds that he has entered a new world: the noises of the street die as in a vacuum; the sundial on the gable tells other hours than those measured by the rumbling wheels and clattering steps without. Here survives a quality which has been expelled from prouder colleges, the secret of repose which, so old masters tell us, once dwelt in Oxford and Cambridge courts. Here are no strident shouts, no twangling banjos, no blazer-

clad groups to make discord with the reverend walls. The bent figures of the gownsmen sunning on the benches or pacing the walks, in academicals of that subfusk hue dispensed with under some easier statutes, give the last touch to the picture of quietude. All is decent, ordered, easeful ; three centuries' habit of repose seems to have grown upon the very stones of the place. There are times when a man may doubt if he could do better, some day when the cares of his own small realm shall lie heavy on his head, than put on the gown and badge, and find ease in some such corner as this—"a place" (as Thomas Newcome of Grey Friars) "for an old fellow when his career is over to hang his sword up, to humble his soul, and wait thankfully for the end"—to obey the call of morning and evening bells, to tend his garden-patch, to feed the pigeons on the grass, to drowse under the southern wall in the sun which almost seems to stand still over the little haven of used force and spent hopes. There are other hours when the sanctuary appears too nearly as a hospital, perhaps as a prison. The very plan of the narrow cloister, the sheltered corners, implies weakness and decay; the iron-sparred windows and the porter's punctual keys assert their meaning. A few years' acquaintance with the inner economy of the foundation will show a man something of the real character of the bedesman's life ; he will learn how much—or how little—of the outward

peace of the house is reflected in the minds of the fraternity; how far he may expect to find among the fast changing company any signs of a sense of sodality, or of solemnity as at the last stage of the journey, with the shadow seldom lifted very far from the doors. It seems at times a school to which the scholars have come too late. The Warden seldom cares to talk of his dealings with that indocile second childhood; one can guess for one's self something of jealousies and bickerings in the narrow neighbourhood, of fallow grounds wherein the roots of old naughtiness stir and shoot in a late spring of sheltered leisure. But, the Warden says, if he is sometimes ready to despair over the old lessons still to learn by the last gleam of day, there will be at times a scholar or two from whom one knows one has almost everything to learn, from whom one may learn, perhaps, to mind one's duty in the way of hope.

I am sufficiently familiar in the house to know something of the diverse characters of the inmates. The gown by no means makes all equal under its iron-grey folds. There is not much in common between old Thomas Harding, the senior of the house, a farm labourer in his ninetieth year, who, with palsied head and knotted rheumatic hands clasped over his crutch, dozes out the end of his regular, ceaselessly laborious and useful days, and George Everest, a little tradesman, corn-chandler and wood-dealer, who has reached a harbour at

length, after forty years of honestly incapable struggles and failures, on whom the new-found leisure sometimes hangs with maddening weight. It would be hard, again, to find a wider difference than that which lies between Eliphaz Puttick, a decayed farmer, a man who has held his two hundred acres, silent and morose, always brooding over that incredible scurvy trick of fortune which has brought him here, and John Blaker, the gnome-like shrivelled little man, full of restless activity and unsuppressible humour, needle-sharp beneath an elaborate pose of short-wittedness, whose descent to the almshouse from the position of odd man and stable-help to Elihu Dean the carrier, is the standing joke of one of the merriest lives that ever breathed. Such broader differences between man and man I can see for myself; with the help of the Warden's hints I can guess at variations in individuals, according to time and chance. Sometimes the husk of decent habit falls off, and old devilry awakes, in horrid travesty of young blood. Reverend grey heads which nodded over their chapel psalms in the morning, spend their exeats in an ancient way, and at locking-up time alarm the quadrangle with feeble war. In one, he with the fine patriarchal head and the courteous manners, a little too ready in ordinary with his texts, a little too obviously on the side of law and order, the smouldering of old vice flickers up under its ashes, and the black histories of youth are mixed with

the trick of mechanic piety. Sometimes one is convinced that the sad old runagates are the survivors of a ruder, tougher race than ours.

At times when I sit on the bench and fancy that I feel the gown about my shoulders, I put aside the recollection of such shadows of the cloister, and think rather of the visible peace and order of the place; of the trim plots which lie behind the quad, where the pensioners stoop and halt about their garden-rows; of the Sunday holiday, when in state of best blue gowns and silver badges the old fellows act the host to visitors from the village or the country round, sons and daughters, grandchildren, old mates, when the quad is alive with the movement of the outer world and sounds with unaccustomed children's treble; of the picture of the chapel benches at evensong, when the broken voices repeat the Nunc Dimittis, and the quiet and the dusk deepening on the familiar memorial stones touch perhaps even the rudest minds with a finer influence, with a sense of the "short remaining watch that yet Our senses have to wake." There is a text carved beneath the coat-of-arms over the inner archway of the gate, the cause of many a puzzled construe to strangers as they pass out under it. But those who know something of the house and its company may find an inner fitness of meaning in the founder's paradox, *Habenti dabitur et abundabit.*

The last time that I took my place on the bench and enrolled myself a visionary member of the brotherhood was on a mild February day, the first truce with winter, the unmistakeable turning point of the year. The sunny afternoon had sent most of the brethren into the village on their slow-footed errands and marketings, and I had the seat mainly to myself for an hour or more. The sun was warm on the stone, shining through a still misty air that softened at once light, colour, and sound. The winter sleep was almost over; one more spring was on the way, with the inextricable pleasures and interests of the living season. The busy time on the land, the soul-steadying routine which balances the world—*et post malam segetem serendum est*—was almost due, but not just yet. It was a day for licensed idling, when a man might with a clear conscience cross his hands behind his head, shut his eyes and let the world go by, without the accusation even of that vacant susurrus in his ears which as a child I used to fancy was the audible pace of time. There was just enough of actual sound in the air, a mingling of the sparrows' chirp and the ruffle of the pigeons' wings with a subdued medley of the village noises, to stop that inward ear, and, together with the mild light and warmth, to take off the minor energies of apprehension and leave the centred mind in majestic indolence. But at our best we can never idle so serenely and whole-

heartedly as the beasts do. The gnat on the ivy-leaf near my head, stroking his forelegs together in the bland sunlight; the pigeons, making believe again and again to settle on the tiles, but always away in fresh circles high in the pale blue; the midge that crawls across my hand, his tiny flat-set wings diamond-bright as ever, but his venom, it seems, harmless yet after the winter's chill; the tortoiseshell butterfly come out of his winter quarters, one wing smutched of its colour down to the grey anatomy, the other snipped by some marauding beak, who opens and shuts his ragged sails to the sun on the ivy berries: all these take the present good with no ill-conditioned inquiry, and give praise for the use of the hearth of the universe in a way which is the simplest of all, and yet usually the last to be achieved, if ever, in human thanksgivings. I own my fellowship with such poor pensioners as these while we come abroad together to greet the broader light, conscious of the sunward-leaning sphere. We are almsmen, as much as the grey-coat brethren here who creep from their winter fires, their sick-beds of customary bronchitis and rheumatics, into the blessed warmth for one more term of the good days. Even if my faith in the disablement of the midge's bite were less active than it is, I should let him range at his will over my knuckles; to-day we are too much in accord to think of coming to blows.

I believe that insufficient attention has on the whole been given to certain sets of feelings proper to the elderly stages of life. We too commonly regard the characteristics of latter middle age as only the leavings of youth, results of habit, bye-products, if not mere detritus. Of course there are virtues to be adjusted, early sentiments to be rubbed down to serviceable bluntness by tumbling in the world; but we neglect the finenesses of perception, the edges of analytic instinct which only begin to get their final polish at about forty, the solicitudes from which a man may look back with a chill of wonder on the barbaric motions of the simpler-minded, sounder-lunged years. Not the least among these gifts of Time's attrition I should place a change in our relation to the lower lives, a hesitation, or something more, as to the terms of our suzerainty, a livelier compunction in the necessary laying of our clumsy hands on the little existences which for ever keep getting in our way. For myself, I find the sorrowful warfare of the gardener—wasps'-nests and mole-traps, and slug-hunts on spring nights—afford more than enough to satisfy my sporting instincts. I have come to a point where I fail to see the fun of killing things. I preach nothing on this head to others; I can remember my own gunning days; I bear about with me the score of my miserable little kills. Let Harry Mansel bombard the Sims-Bigg pheasants three days a week, and even the

Warden have his Saturday at Frogswell now and then in the season; for my choice, I have had enough of death already; I would rather patch up and piece out shaky lives to last as many suns as they may, and share with all sorts of creatures the kindly almshouse benches and south corners of the world. To-day I have my own way: here we are all once more through the dark and cold, facing the new year valiantly, midges and butterflies and pigeons on the sunny roofs, and old gownsmen mending nicely from bouts of the time-honoured complaints. Up in my own fir trees, as the light begins to thicken towards roosting time, the pheasants will be kok-kokking lustily, safe for another nine months from the rattle of the beaters' sticks and the glint on the guns where the hazels thin towards the tail of the wood. I do not love the bird; he is a showy, noisy alien, always discordant in English woodlands; yet shall the Frogswell coverts be free-warren before I clean the rust from my old barrels again.

Here the Warden came into the quad from the entry, and bending his shaggy brows to see who was sitting in the sun under the wall, crossed the grass and joined me on the bench. He also showed in his own way something of the pleasant influences of the time. He was relieved to have two or three of the old men off the sick-list and managing for themselves again. I found, too, that Molly Crofts was coming early next month on one of those

rejuvenating visits of hers. And there was a substratum of very decided satisfaction in his temper concerning a review of his in last week's *Orb*, a very irreverent review of a weighty modern philosopher, which he had hardly fancied any editor would print, and which had drawn the philosopher like a shot. Under the mild breathings of the hour, he was inclined to be patient with the heavy thinker whom he really seemed to have upset very much, and to be benignly contemptuous towards the physiological people and their thumbings of the awful complexity of life—awful yet entrancing, more and more every day we live, says the Warden. He even seemed ready to suffer—I would not say gladly, but rather more equably than on other occasions—the Biblical critics with that modest comparative title, fellows whose taste no one would trust to meddle with a line in Euripides. For once he shows signs of a mental spring-tide, and feels the sphere of thought tilting towards the light together with the dædal globe. We are getting out of the frozen slush of "science" by degrees, he thinks; when we are tired of splitting up the atom we may get back to the real mysteries—such as humour, for instance, and the thing we call vulgarity, or the real philosophy of history.

Or beauty, I should have added; every man has his particular province in these neglected fields, marked out for himself, if he will but look about

him. At any rate I can agree with the Warden that if we want work, there is boundless and almost untouched matter ready to our hands.

The Warden presently went in to finish Almshouse accounts for the audit; and when the afternoon began to decline, I left the bench and took the footpath home. The sun sank to a cloudless setting on the hills, and fired the land with a deep afterglow. As I came in at the field gate the light on the fir trunks was wine-red and rusty crimson, and the dark masses of the boughs and the brown garden plots loomed in majestic russets and purples. A blackbird close to the house suddenly warbled a turn or two of the unforgotten song, and a smell of live grass and coltsfoot-leaves came on the air. It was one of the hours of natural elation; and when the glorying humour takes us, it is good economy to make the most of the chance. It is the minor key, after all, which is easy and cheap and vulgar—to go back to one of the Warden's mysteries. In this genial twilight, at the turn of the year, with the better days coming, with life still unrolling the inexpressible interest of all its depths and subtleties before us, it is not very difficult to sound a major scale. The days will come again, the days of aches and tempers, proper and alien, of east winds temporal and spiritual, of outward rubs and an ingrowing soul, when the temptation to the sneaking underbred minor chord will be sore. The thing to aim at

is a workable temper, balanced between the extremes, a frame of mind which can keep its counsel in the frozen time, and expand frankly at the spring. One can wish for such a rational state, in which a man can sit about in sunny almshouse corners, and often forget the porter's keys; can make room for other people's views, allow the Warden's theories or Harry Mansel's aims, or sometimes see things as they should be in Molly Crofts' eyes; and can manage on his own account to observe with a not unadvised content how life burns away, as the ruddy glow kindles evening by evening on the fir boughs overhead.

XXV

April 18.

"WE'RE going to Rivers Wood to-morrow, to get primroses and have tea at the High Beeches ; the Warden, and Molly, and Harry Mansel, Lady Anne, and the Sims-Bigg girls, and perhaps the Yarborough-Greenhalghs. Suppose you take a holiday for once and come with us." Thus Mary Enderby to me as we met during the morning expatiation in the street, on a wonderful April day, one of a memorable week, all sun and kindly winds, with a soft dripping shower or two at the nick of time to keep everything in tune, a spell of weather which brought out the leaves and greened the meadows all at once, and gave the shining street a look of summer. The shops rig out their sun-blinds, the cottage gardens are gay with tulips and daffodils, the forenoon shopping hour is brave with another early blossoming, the outbreak from winter coats and hats. There is a roving spirit in the air ; people who are content for the rest of the year with the length of the village street, feel an adventurous motion, and so we hear of

long walks and primrose gatherings, and tea in Rivers Wood.

There was the least sarcastic inflection in the last part of my cousin's invitation. My observation, that I am almost the only person in the neighbourhood who is not blessed with boundless leisure, does not commend itself everywhere as it deserves to do. Mary and some others of her sect do not consider that, granted certain contentions for the sake of argument, one's chains may be all the tighter for having been riveted on by one's self. Still, I thought that for once I might show her that I could get out of bounds if I liked; besides, Rivers Wood is in a way my own preserves, and if there was to be any junketing as near my borders as that, I would as soon have a hand in it as not. So I said I would try and arrange things, and if I found I could manage it, I would be at the lower heave-gate at three o'clock on the morrow—always provided that the weather was still fine. Mary, who did not seem to take my acceptance to be so conditional as I had made it, gave a half-glance at the wrong quarter of the sky and said she was sure it was set fair for another week at least; and so left me, and went on to the Almshouse to arrange details of supply with Molly Crofts.

The morrow was fair enough, with a faint veil of vapour across the sky, which meant the approaching break up of the spell of delicate weather. I was at the heave-gate early enough to have to wait a

quarter of an hour for the last of the party—Mary Enderby and Molly Crofts. We rambled down the long rides and took sundry turnings and split up into groups, and some of us lost the way, and there was calling and answering and reappearances at corners of the wood-ways to form fresh combinations of company; and I think that most of us responded tolerably to the spell of the afternoon. A week of April drought brooding warm on the wet hollows of the woodland, still stored full of the winter's rain, had brought out the flowers in a way only seen two or three times in a life. The primroses strewed the slopes as though they had been flung and shot in armfuls from fairy baskets, or as though Flora's apron had slipped and let out all her store together; where they stood a little thinner there were drifts and clouds of wind-flowers; violets trailed over the steeper banks, and the just-coming hyacinths threw a misty blue over their beds of dusk-green leafage. The shadows of the saplings lay faint and sharp across the grass of the rides, and went on to lose themselves in mazes of thin tracery among the dead leaves and twigs, the ivy-trails and mosses of the thicket. The air was warm and soft, stirring southerly enough to bring out all the scents of the wood—the wet earth and moss, the keen sweetness of the budding larches, above everything else, the infinity of primroses.

Some had brought baskets for flower-picking,

and fell to their business about the green shaw; the rest idled through its winding paths, up the brows and down the gills, or sat and talked on faggots or logs, all making their way sooner or later towards the High Beeches, where I had instructed Mrs. Ventom to meet us with kettle and crockery from Burntoak, and to have ready the elements of tea. In this gradual progress towards the rendezvous, at first the men and the women sided off by themselves, Sussex fashion; and Harry Mansel and I and the Warden smoked a pipe or two under a faggot-stack, and watched the ladies at their flower-gathering, nymph-like, far off along the shining slopes between the saplings. Then, when the baskets were full, we all met and paired off at the crossways in the middle of the wood, and made towards the great clump of beeches two and two. Lady Anne and the Warden led the way, and were soon out of sight; Mary Enderby and I presently sat down on a dry bank, and let the rest go by us—Harry Mansel with the younger Miss Sims-Bigg, and Molly Crofts and Mab Yarborough-Greenhalgh arm-in-arm in a young ladies' conference, altogether superior to the insufficiency of cavaliers.

I dare say, if we had not fallen into that particular sorting or shuffling of the party, both my cousin and myself might have had something to say about the agreeableness of the hour and the place; but when we are in company we seem to have the

quality of extinguishing in each other the smallest glimmering of sentiment of any kind, and we did not audibly admire the view. It was a view which certainly might have excused rhapsodies: beyond the flower-strewn foreground a gap in the pale emerald screen of the larch plantation gave sight of the happy valley, the familiar fields and roofs, the spire, the ridges of purple woods, and the Downs a fess of hyacinthine vapour over it all. The southern sky was meshed and threaded with a slowly thickening and rising veil, foretelling the rain which would come to-morrow to break up prosperously the April drought. Overhead a blackbird sang, so near us in the larch that we could see the motion of his yellow bill as he trolled out his richest warble, or listened a moment, head aslant, to the other voices of the grove. From the fallow on the edge of the plantation came the pipe of a plover beating to and fro; and a stock-dove bore a drowsy burden to the rest somewhere deep in the hollows of the wood.

As enthusiasm was barred by that reciprocal self-denying ordinance of ours, my cousin and I were silent, or talked of common things. We even descended so far as into criticism of Gwendolen Sims-Bigg's hat, its congruity with woodland picnics, and whether or no it was to be thought that Harry Mansel spent any fraction of the irrecoverable hours on the ends of his moustache. It occurred to me to ask if I was right in thinking

that somehow or other Harry had fallen out of Lady Anne's good graces to-day. I said nothing about my observation that Mary herself had been absolutely truculent to the young man when they had come across each other; for she had carried her feud with him for half the summer at least. My cousin's expressions are, as a rule, perspicuous to a fault; but her answer on this occasion was, to my comprehension, irrelevant and even enigmatical. All I could get from her was that Harry's leave was up in another fortnight, and if people *would* be fools, they must go their own gate; and she immediately changed the subject, returning in a very critical temper to Miss Sims-Bigg's hat and hair, and a way I am told she has of looking arch out of the corners of her eyes. We presently heard halloos from the higher wood, summoning stragglers to tea, and when we reached the High Beeches we found the rest of the company gathered about the kettle singing over a stick fire, tablecloths spread and cups ranged, and baskets of Burntoak provision lying among the anemones. Mrs. Ventom surveyed her preparations with an air of tolerant allowance for the eccentric folk, who with good tea-tables of their own at home must take their pleasure in this heathenish way, like so many tramps. The tea was not the light-hearted affair it should have been: there was a vague sense of failure in the air; Lady Anne was perceptibly holding a temper on the curb; Molly Crofts did

not seem to be herself; Mary Enderby was almost rude to Gwendolen Sims-Bigg, and Harry, on the outskirts of the company, seemed to be the victim of a solid gloom. Mrs. Ventom waited on us with an air of philosophic detachment which suggested that she, at any rate, if she liked, could have told us what was the matter with the afternoon.

When tea was done, and we began to make our way down towards the road again, I found my cousin's humour had not by any means improved. She thought if people must pair off two and two, like Noah's animals, they might shuffle themselves a little now and then. I took the compliment for what it was worth, conceiving it to be aimed a good way over my head. We could hear confused voices here and there, in the wood-walks behind us, of people who were evidently in no hurry to get to the barway, and as Mary seemed more inclined to listen to them than to me, I held my tongue and let my thoughts descend to the general from the particular. The young people, as far as I could judge, had not been so ecstatically happier than the elders in the charm of the spring day. By all visible signs I had found my account with the woods and the weather at a much better rate than either Harry Mansel or Molly Crofts, let us say. There is often a tragic touch in hours such as these, a pang in the very pleasure, for something going by, unseizable for mere plenty, like the million primroses beyond the capacity of kerchief

or basket; but I doubt if that feeling would present itself definitely enough to these girls and boys to affect their natural gaiety. Perhaps it is by virtue of our age that we seniors are able to make the better bargain, and get more real glorying out of the good days. After all, we have learnt to take hold less greedily than once we did of the things held out to us, and the ultimate refusal is less poignant when it comes. Instead of trying to fill our hands or our baskets from Time's flower posies, we hear him say "Smell how good!" and with hands behind us put our noses with a fair show of content to the bunch before it passes. Perhaps a man's days have not run altogether amiss if they make it practicable in an hour such as this to feel the fundamental comedy running through the whole play; and if he have got beyond joining in the choric figures, at least to beat time to the trochaics from the back benches of the theatre.

I was becoming a little tired of saying nothing, and had begun to give utterance to some reflections about substance and shadow, eating one's cake and having it, when Mary got up from the tree-root we had been sitting on, and said it was no good waiting all day for people who had no idea of time, and that we had better get on. We had not taken two steps when we heard a laugh behind us, and into the clearing at the end of the long ride came Harry Mansel and Molly Crofts together. I

caught a glimpse of Molly's face, and a momentary impression of the two figures hand-in-hand as they came down the path, and then my cousin seized me by the elbow and jerked me aside into the turning of the ride by which we were standing. I had followed her indication promptly enough, and the hazels were perhaps sufficiently budded to make a screen and hide us, if the two had had eyes to look our way.

"Come on, and let us get out of this," said Mary, in a whisper of the tensest energy. "They won't want us bothering about here." So after standing and holding our breath like conspirators behind our covert, we presently made our way to the barway by roundabout and unlikely paths. We found that we were behind all the rest, and so walked down to the village by ourselves. My cousin was rather absent-minded, and quite uncivilly taciturn; but when we said good night at the head of the street, while the twilight flushed a dull rose from the afterglow, there was a look in her face such as I remembered had shone on an evening like this a year ago, a reflection, I think, of the light which we had seen for a moment in Molly's eyes.

THE END

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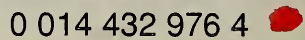
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